Etymology and Wordplay in Medieval Literature

Edited by
Mikael Males

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in Medieval Literature

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Introduction

Mikael Males

The study of medieval etymology demands a leap of faith in the modern scholar. The etymologies are often false, and medieval authors had no qualms about lending equal support to several mutually contradictory etymologies. The case of medieval wordplay is, if anything, even worse. The use of imperfect homonyms to convey essential points of theology, not only for rhetorical impact in sermons, but also in works of a theoretical nature, may come across as both inappropriate and trivial. Whatever our modern opinions on the epistemic value of etymology and wordplay may be, however, they hold essential clues to medieval modes of reading, as well as to medieval views on the acquisition of knowledge generally. Once the eye gets accustomed to looking, furthermore, such devices appear to be near ubiquitous in medieval literature, and they may often serve as helpful guides for arriving at interpretations that do justice to the cultural expectations of the authors and their intended audience.

Based on these observations, the present book has a threefold purpose. First, it is intended to give a broad — if necessarily incomplete — overview of the many medieval uses of etymology and wordplay, and how these can serve as guides to textual interpretation. Some of these uses may appear alien to the linguist or even to the medievalist who is coming to this subject for the first time, in which case the overviews by Vivien Law as well as Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter may be highly recommended.[1] Second, it sets out to investigate how

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[1] Law, *The History of Linguistics in Europe*; *Medieval Grammar & Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter.

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such practices may reflect attitudes and assumptions about the relationship between language and knowledge. Third, it is an attempt to illustrate the wide dissemination of such practices. This is partly done by moving beyond theoretical discourses on language into different and more popular genres of literature, in order that the analyses will not be confined to what a limited number of scholars claimed that language could do and how they thought that one could attain knowledge. Rather, we hope to illustrate the practice of broader groups of text users and the paths to knowledge that they intuitively thought viable.

To this end, we also attempt to bridge the divide between Latin and the vernaculars, and we have collected examples from across Latin Christendom, from east to west and from north to south. The overall aim is not to map or systematize etymological practices, which would be a massive undertaking indeed, but rather to investigate, through a number of case studies, how the functions of etymology and wordplay may contribute to our understanding of medieval textual culture and cognitive perceptions at large. The studies collectively attempt to retrieve unexpressed assumptions about language and truth, so naïve that they were repeatedly refuted by philosophers, but so integrated into medieval textual practices that they have nonetheless left their mark on the texts even of their most ardent critics.[2] Therefore, all chapters apart from 'Etymology, Wordplay, and the Truth Value of the Linguistic Sign from Antiquity to the Middle Ages' are based on literature that does not explicitly treat the epistemic value of language.

By the questions involved and the sources used we hope to address issues that are central to several branches of medieval scholarship. The history of medieval philosophy traces developments of theories of signification over time and between thinkers.[3] Such analyses focus on the foremost scholars of medieval Europe, but what often remains lost in the telling is that thousands of authors and intellectuals were active alongside them, and most of their assumptions about semantics probably resembled what may be found in the various chapters of the present book, rather than in a history of philosophy. From the point of

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[2] For the example of St Augustine, see Males, 'Etymology, Wordplay, and the Truth Value of the Linguistic Sign from Antiquity to the Middle Ages'.

[3] Theories on linguistic signification and the existence of universals was one of the most important branches of medieval philosophy. A representative impression of the importance and the different varieties of such studies may be gained through, for instance, the various chapters on the topic in Pasnau, *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*: Ashworth, 'Terminist Logic'; Klima, 'Nominalist Semantics'; Biard, 'Nominalism in the Later Middle Ages'; Rosier-Catach, 'Grammar'; van Dyke, 'Mysticism'; Williams, 'Describing God'.

view of widespread intellectual tendencies, then, it is to be hoped that this book may be a valuable addition to studies in philosophy. It will show, for instance, that many authors worked on the assumption that words could hold important keys to the true nature of things, even though this was always a problematic proposition in a theoretical context. Furthermore, this book will reveal that the intellectual foundation of European thinking about semantics remained much the same for a thousand years, largely untouched by the progressive dialogue of the sharpest minds. Finally, it will be seen that even the most acute thinkers did not necessarily adhere to their own precepts beyond the confines of the philosophical discourse. St Augustine is a case in point, since his theoretical discussion of semantics — including his critique of etymology in *De dialectica* and elsewhere — has left no perceptible imprint on his own use of etymology and wordplay. His impact on medieval textual practices, in turn, was incalculable, and he may well have been as important for medieval uses of etymology and wordplay as Isidore of Seville, even if Augustine's influence in this regard is more difficult to assess.

Literary scholars and theologians alike are constantly faced with problems of textual interpretation. Another aim of this book, therefore, is to investigate, by way of textual analysis, how etymology and wordplay can aid the scholar in arriving at interpretations that are supported by pointers that the authors themselves have planted in the texts. These can indicate the tenor of reception that the author envisions, whether meditative, jesting, or pondering, but also how a plot will unfold and what its core meaning is. Increasingly, theoretical affiliation has come to guide scholarly interpretation of medieval texts, and indications like these are therefore valuable in order to test the applicability of any given approach. The usefulness of this tool is dependent on an understanding of medieval uses of etymology and wordplay, and this, in turn, must be inferred through analysis of text. This process is aided by several factors. To begin with, etymology and wordplay are often quite visible in the sources and need not therefore be hypothesized out of thin air. Furthermore, we may safely assume that the impact of Isidore's *Etymologiae* and sermon literature, for instance, was incomparably more important for the basic intellectual posture of medieval scholars than that of a theoretical work like St Augustine's *De dialectica*. The influence of Isidore and sermons was not discourse-specific but can be traced in any number of genres and stylistic registers. Not so the intellectual ramifications of a theoretical work like *De dialectica* or of Boethius's commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, two of the most important works for the theory of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign (or against the existence of universals, in the case of Boethius). When medieval scholars wrote about issues raised in those

works, they entered into a debate which did not necessarily affect its literary surroundings. To put it bluntly: Peter Abelard's views on universals were irrelevant to the somewhat later composition of the *Legenda aurea*, where etymology and wordplay abound, serving as pointers to divine truths. Comparing the *Logica ingredientibus* to the *Legenda aurea* may seem ludicrous, but it serves to underline the basic point. Even though it is said to be 'for beginners' (*ingredientibus*), the impact of the former was restricted to a narrow group of intellectuals, and it was, even within that group, specific to philosophical discussions on signification. The influence of the *Legenda aurea*, by contrast, was such that it affected the literary makeup of Latin Christendom as a whole. Furthermore, the devotional content of the *Legenda aurea* shows that etymology and wordplay was intended to add to the experience as well as to understanding in a profound way. Indeed, a functional analysis will show that in medieval literature, etymologies and even wordplay could be used in much the same way as quotations by the major authorities of Antiquity (see Verkholantsev's chapter in this book).[4] To modern sensibilities, this may appear as peculiar, in particular since medieval etymology is based on such demonstrably faulty assumptions. If one posits a close word–thing relationship, however, this function is all but self-evident. We are dealing here with the authority of God's creation as it reveals itself through language.

The character of the sources, then, can give us some clues as to the most common assumptions underlying the use of etymology and wordplay in the Middle Ages. Based on that understanding, these devices can lend strong support for establishing contextually plausible interpretations of text.

Modern difficulties in approaching medieval etymology are to some extent based on what kind of information we expect it to reveal; modern etymology aims at finding or reconstructing the oldest form of a word, medieval etymology at retrieving its full meaning.[5] Modern etymology is diachronic and genetic; it traces the development of a given combination of sounds connected

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[4] A good example of this is the use of the etymology *rex a recte agendo* ('king' from 'acting justly') and similar formulae in medieval mirrors of princes (see *Fürstenspiegel des frühen und hohen Mittelalters*, ed. and trans. by Anton, pp. 64, 72, 110, 156, 204, 348). In the context of a king's mirror, this etymology functions as a moral imperative. A passage in Sedulius Scottus's *Liber de rectoribus christianis* is particularly interesting, since it makes use of wordplay rather than an explicit etymology: *Rex erit, qui recte faciet; qui non faciet, non erit* (he who acts justly will be a king; he who does not, will not) (*Fürstenspiegel des frühen und hohen Mittelalters*, ed. and trans. by Anton, p. 110).

[5] See Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, p. 8; Opelt, 'Etymologie', col. 797.

to a given set of meanings over time. In this regard, it is more akin to what from the twelfth century on was called *derivatio* than to what was then known as *etymologia*.[6] Medieval etymology, on the other hand, was in practice often synchronic or indeed achronic.[7] It aimed at revealing the meaning or force (*vis*) of a word through connection to phonetically similar words. It was, furthermore, based on the assumption that word and thing (both the concept and its physical manifestations) are connected in an essential way; the relation between signifier and signified is not arbitrary. From an external, linguistic point of view this is certainly wrong. From a psychological perspective, though, the connection between word and thing may indeed be essential, and in dreams the medieval etymological principle retains its full vigour. Sigmund Freud gives many examples of the complex interconnectedness of semantics and phonetics in dreams, one of which may suffice here: The dreamer is sitting (*sitzt*) as an officer across the table from the emperor. As the dreamer himself explained, this means that he is in opposition (*gegensatz*) to his father. The interpretation is thus at least partly based on the phonosemantic association of *sitzen* and -*satz*.[8] Occurrences like this serve to illustrate that when language is seen through the eyes of a human being, there is nothing inherently wrong in the perception of an intrinsic word–thing relationship.

To the extent that medieval etymology is studied at all, it is generally studied on its own. The synchronic, associative way of connecting phonetics and meaning described above, however, also took on other forms on many levels of discourse. Etymology may be defined as the cases when phonetic relationships and their meanings are spelled out in a more or less formulaic way, as in 'flumen, quia fluendo crevit, a fluendo dictum' ('river' (*flumen*) is called from (*a*) 'flowing' (*fluendo*) because (*quia*) it grows by 'flowing' (*fluendo*)).[9] The most common formulaic markers are *quod*/*quia* (because), *a* (from), and *quasi* (as if), two of which figure in the quotation above. A typical *quasi* formula is 'Litterae autem dictae quasi legiterae, quod iter legentibus praestent' (letters

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[6] See Males, 'Etymology, Wordplay, and the Truth Value of the Linguistic Sign from Antiquity to the Middle Ages', in this volume. Unlike in modern etymology, though, *derivatio* was more of a pedagogical than a historical tool.

[7] There is a diachronic dimension embedded in the concept of *impositio* 'imposition' of a word on a thing. Etymology aims at uncovering the true meaning and thus the reason for the imposition of the word, something that supposedly happened long ago. This diachronic aspect, however, generally has no methodological implications, though it may serve as a hinge for narrative.

[8] Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, p. 278.

[9] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 1.29, ed. by Lindsay.

are named as if (*quasi*) [their name were] *legiterae*, because they provide a route (*iter*) for the readers (*legentibus*)).[10]

When phonetic relationships are not explicitly commented upon, we are no longer dealing with etymology and other terminology is expedient. The term *paronomasia* designates the use of phonetically similar words without specification of function — it may, for instance, be purely ornamental. *Wordplay*, on the other hand, indicates that paronomasia is used to produce additional meaning. Finally, *etymology* also spells this meaning out. Only semantically significant paronomasia, that is, wordplay and etymology, will be treated in this book (though ornamental paronomasia may be drawn in for comparison). It should be noted that the term *wordplay* is not meant to indicate that semantically significant paronomasia was only playful and void of any claims on truth. Such irreverent wordplay was common in the Middle Ages, as it is today, and its presence is generally not problematic to the modern reader (though the sense of humour may be). Often, however, wordplay was used to convey meaning that was considered to be both true and of great importance, and in these cases the reader may easily be put off or the point pass unnoticed. For this reason, one of the main aims of this book is to show how, in many different ways, wordplay could be used for more serious purposes than has since become the norm, and that modern scholars disregard such epistemic intent at their own peril.

An illustrative and famous example of medieval wordplay is found in a passage in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, where Pope Gregory the Great inquires about the nationality of some slaves and is told that they are *Angli* (English). He retorts: 'Bene, nam et *angel*icam habent faciem, et tales *angel*orum in caelis decet esse coheredes' (Good, since they both have *angel*ic faces and it is fitting that such as they be joint heirs with the *angel*s in heaven).[11] Here, the underlying epistemic assumptions are not made manifest in the source itself. Nonetheless, both the etymological tradition and the frequent use of wordplay to convey sublime truths in medieval literature indicate that the lack of explicit truth claims does not preclude their tacit presence. This example is case in point, where wordplay serves as a marker for inspired foresight: Gregory, through Bede, knew that phonetic similarity was one of the ways in which God revealed his plans to the ones on whom he had bestowed the gift of interpretation.

The example also illustrates the somewhat blurry distinction between etymology and wordplay, with regard to both form and function. 'Good' is an

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[10] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 1.3, ed. by Lindsay.

[11] Bede, *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple Anglais*, ed. by Lapidge and Crépin, trans. by Monat and Robin, p. 286.

idiomatically sound translation, but since Gregory is here responding to the information that the slaves he sees are called (*vocarentur*) *Angli*, *bene* is probably meant to express something along the lines of *bene vocati sunt* (they have received a suitable name). The phrase is followed by *nam* (since), indicating in what way the name is suitable. *Nam* does not figure in etymological formulae, but the similarity between Bede's 'the name is suitable since (*nam*) …' and the etymological 'X is so called because (*quod/quia*) …' is obvious. The parallel is not only formal; in this quotation, as in etymologies, phonetic similarity is understood to reveal something essential about the meaning of the word in question (here the implications of the word *Angli* for the spread of Christianity).[12] The example may thus serve to illustrate the continuum from etymology to wordplay and to clarify why a synoptic perspective has been chosen for this book.[13] Other possible ways of distinguishing between etymology and wordplay often end up drawing 'correct', that is, modern, etymology into the definition, at the risk of creating confusion or passing judgement.

The nexus of wordplay and etymology, and the flexibility inherent to it, has resulted in a staggering array of strategies for producing and retrieving meaning in texts. Such practices often produce considerable semantic ambiguity, which neatly conforms to the multimodality that is typical of many medieval genres, owing to the exegetical tradition in general and to allegorical reading in particular. Indeed, as will become evident throughout the book, etymology/wordplay and allegory often went hand in hand and served to enhance each other.[14] This is in keeping with a fundamental medieval assumption that

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[12] There are three instances of wordplay in this passage. The second is *Deiri* (from Deira [Northumbria]) and *de ira* (from the wrath [of God]), the third is the name of the king *Ealle* and *alleluia*. In the last instance, Bede explains that Gregory played on the name of the king (*alludens ad nomen*). These words may have been inserted simply to alert the reader that there is wordplay going on here, since it is less clearly visible than in the other two cases. Even so, the use of a word for 'play' is noteworthy, but should probably not be taken to mean that Bede is distancing himself from the anecdote — on the contrary, he has just written that although it is of local provenance (meaning the *Whitby Life of Gregory*), it should not be passed over in silence. Rather, we see here how play with serious matters was often seen as something which added to the experience; this is also one of the main hypotheses in Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*.

[13] Etymology and paronomasia have otherwise been most closely connected within classical studies. Prominent works are O'Hara, *True Names* and Ahl, *Metaformations*.

[14] The best study of the connection between medieval etymology and allegory is Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, pp. 138–84. See also Del Bello, *Forgotten Paths*; Ohly, 'Vom geistigen Sinn des Wortes im Mittelalter', pp. 12–13.

obscurity, hints, and intellectual puzzles through their inherent 'sweetness' (*dulcedo*) stimulated the mind in its search for truth.[15] It was also thought that God would not reveal his secrets indiscriminately, but rather through pointers to be understood by those who sought in earnest.[16] This was one of the most important functions of wordplay, and it may be the one most alien to many modern readers. Augustine's words about the semantic transfers of metaphors are, I believe, equally apt to describe those of wordplay: 'Quae quanto magis translatis verbis videntur operiri, tanto magis cum fuerint aperta dulcescunt' (The more these things [divine truths] are seen to be covered by metaphors, the sweeter they become when uncovered).[17]

The focus of this book lies on the written word, and even with this restriction, we can but give a representative selection of medieval uses of wordplay and etymology across the linguistic map. It should be noted, though, that medieval literature, art, and meditation were intertwined in an endless web of signification, and within this flow of meaning, wordplay could bleed over into its surroundings. One example of this lies closer than others to both written text and linguistic expression, namely the images based on wordplay that are found in the margins of some medieval manuscripts. In certain cases, the images seem to be based on Anglo-French words for margins, *bo(u)rdure* and *marges*, with paronyms such as *bo(u)rde* (play, jest), *bo(u)rden* (joust), *bo(u)rde* (brothel), *marguerites* (daisies), *margeries* (pearls).[18] These paronyms are visually represented in the margins, and their functions may be variously analysed as stimulating the reader's intellect, memory, or ethical sensibilities. While we do not treat wordplay in other than written form here, the reader should be aware that the story could potentially unfold into other branches of medieval intellectual and artistic output.

Within the framework of writing set for the book, the multimodality and multifunctionality of medieval wordplay and etymology are amply illustrated by the various chapters. To mention just a few points: Wordplay could be extremely open-ended, inviting the reader to meditation (Old English), but it could also be completely closed — a matter of yes-or-no answers (Old Norse). It could be used within pronouncedly religious and secular discourses alike

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[15] Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, pp. 61–70; Ziolkowski, 'Theories of Obscurity in the Latin Middle Ages', pp. 143–53.

[16] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 4. 61, ed. and trans. by Green, p. 222.

[17] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 4. 48, ed. and trans. by Green, p. 216; my translation here.

[18] Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, pp. 162–63.

(Old English, Middle High German), but could also be employed to negotiate the border between the two (Old French). Etymology could be used heuristically to arrive at allegorical interpretation (Latin), but also to uncover the meanings of historical events (Slavic). Because of the auditive qualities of etymology and wordplay, there was often a strong connection to poetry, not least within traditions which used end-rhyme (Old French, Middle High German, Italian). There was no upper limit to the dignity of subjects where wordplay could be used; it could enhance the importance of witnesses in a juridical setting (Old Irish) or convey theological points (St Augustine), and on the other end of the scale, it could be used for sexual innuendo (Middle High German). Ethnogenesis or the predestination of a people is a recurrent theme, presumably because etymology could stand in as an authority attesting to the historical significance of different ethnic groups (Slavic, Old Norse, Bede).

In this book, the chapters do not follow a chronological order, since that might convey an impression of development which would require at least a book-length study for each tradition to establish. Furthermore, while some diachronic developments within the use of etymology and wordplay can be detected, the continuity of such practices and the constant interaction of different functions are much more salient features. A chronological progression would thus be partly deceptive. Accordingly, only 'Etymology, Wordplay, and the Truth Value of the Linguistic Sign from Antiquity to the Middle Ages' provides a chronological overview within the Latin tradition, and later chapters are case studies that tie into the overall focus on the various functions of etymology and wordplay. With regard to the order of the chapters, the dominant discourse of Latin is treated first, and then related languages and German, which belonged to the same core area of Europe. More distant regions are treated last. In 'Etymology, Wordplay, and the Truth Value of the Linguistic Sign from Antiquity to the Middle Ages', Mikael Males provides a historical background to the rest of the book. Focus rests largely on the tension between the perceptions of phonosemantic arbitrariness within philosophical discourse and the non-arbitrariness of medieval textual practice. This overview is then followed by a case study of St Augustine, who embodies both trends and shows that they were not mutually exclusive. In '*Discretionis libra* (With the Scales of Discernment): Allegorical Writing and the Concealment of *etymologia*', Wim Verbaal describes how techniques derived from etymology informed the conception of the works of Alan of Lille and other writers and how important these are for understanding their nature, but also for appreciating the medieval mode of reading generally. In 'The Terminal Paronomasia of Gautier de Coinci', Keith Busby examines the nature and function of par-

onomasia in the work of Gautier de Coinci (1177/78–1236), principally in *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Long and complex passages of wordplay usually occur at the end of the individual miracles and serve as incitement to reflect on the moral and ethical issues at the heart of each tale. Gautier reconciles traditions of the sacred and the secular, Latin and the vernacular, in a work whose *merveilleux chrétien* offers an attractive alternative to the *merveilleux païen* of courtly literature. In 'Soteriological Macaronics: Ambiguum and Paranomasia in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*', Stephen Carey examines Wolfram von Eschenbach's early thirteenth-century masterpiece, *Parzival*. Like many of the other early German romances, *Parzival* draws on a French Arthurian source by Chrétien de Troyes, but this text contains more French language than any other German romance. Additionally, Wolfram either renames or provides names for an extraordinary number of characters, and these names become the locus for semantic games. Carey examines Wolfram von Eschenbach's use of ambiguum and paronomasia as a narrative device which not only provides occasion for bawdy comic relief but also serves as an interpretive guide which elucidates the function of the text to communicate a network of heterogeneous competing meanings by offering multiple interpretive possibilities. *Parzival* thus amply attests to the perceived 'sweetness' of ambiguity and obscurity, while also negotiating the borders between the temporal and the divine by planting theological pointers within a staunchly secular setting. In '"Scuro saccio che par lo | meo detto" (I Know that my Words Seem Obscure): Wordplay and Obscurity in Thirteenth-Century Italian Poetry', Paolo Borsa analyses the peculiar style of the hermetic Italian poets of the so-called Siculo-Tuscan tradition, which flourished in Tuscany in the second half of the thirteenth century. In the compositons of Guittone d'Arezzo, Monte Andrea, and other poets of the same generation, obscurity and ambiguity are explored not only phonetically, but also graphically, in the new and flexible medium of vernacular writing. Borsa argues that the semantic play within their poetry is largely contained within language and text itself, and that this practice later provoked a reaction from Dante, whose phonosemantic associations were intended to stimulate contemplation on the deeper meaning of his text. In 'Etymology, Wordplay, and Allegorical Reading in Some Medieval Irish Texts', Jan Erik Rekdal discusses how a central term in an Old Irish law text is interpreted by means of etymology and polysemy, and how these devices are employed to underline the gravity of juridical discourse. Here, the authoritative function of etymology is fully borne out. The second half of the chapter shifts to another register, aiming to show how etymology and polysemy could be of equal importance also to narrative, since they seem to underlie the structure, if not the entire conception, of a Middle-Irish

death-tale (*aided*). The associative semantics of wordplay here stimulate the mind of the reader to keep on searching for the meaning of the text. In 'Puns and Poetic Style in Old English', Eric Weiskott initially surveys the evidence for the dating, circulation, authorship, and localization of Old English poetry, and gives an overview of older and newer critical approaches in Old English studies to work on wordplay and poetic style. He argues that poetic style can sometimes provide more precise answers to literary-historical questions than traditional modes of critical inquiry. The essay concludes by identifying and discussing several puns on nautical terminology in the Old English *Exodus*, a long narrative poem very loosely based on Exodus 13. 18–22 and 14. 1–31. This poem demonstrates the potential of wordplay for scriptural exegesis in a vernacular setting, and the strong emphasis on polysemy within that tradition is accentuated by the use of words that can in themselves carry multiple meanings. In 'Etymological Interpretation of Dreams in Old Icelandic Literature', Mikael Males examines a curious feature of Old Icelandic literature, namely the etymological interpretation of dreams, which is there used repeatedly and without obvious European parallels. He surveys the most prominent examples and investigates the reasons for the use of this method. He suggests that etymology of Latin extraction has here entered into a fruitful symbiosis with local poetic practices. Old Icelandic narrative style features a suppressed narrator's voice, and this etymological device enables the narrator to comment on events without breaking that code, while at the same time inviting readers to a semantic game which would normally play out in the poetry quoted in the sagas. In 'Language as Artifact: The Practice of *Etymologia* in the Narratives about the Origin of the Slavs', Julia Verkholantsev examines myths of origin contained in late medieval Slavic chronicles within the context of medieval rhetoric and grammar. Particularly, she focuses on the study of ethnonyms and endonyms and how etymology was used as a heuristic tool for historical investigation. To these chroniclers, etymology served two central functions. First, it suggested how historical events should be interpreted, and second, it provided the interpretation with a sense of authority, since it was based on an understanding of the relationship between language and the world.

When viewed synoptically, the chapters in this book illustrate and analyse the various functions of etymology and wordplay in the Middle Ages, and their geographical and linguistic spread bear witness to the pan-European character of the phenomenon. At the same time, the different traditions involved demonstrate how these devices were adapted to their cultural and linguistic setting, whether it be one of multilingualism, of an extremely strong poetic tradition, or of negotiations regarding how the vernacular should be committed to writing.

This variety bears witness to the extreme flexibility of paronomastic strategies. By contrast, their recurrent use for interpretation, all across the linguistic spectrum, also attests to the stability of one fundamental assumption which modernity does not share with medieval authors: namely, that phonetic similarity is not coincidental and may therefore serve as a powerful tool for interpretation.

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Etymology, Wordplay, and the Truth Value of the Linguistic Sign from Antiquity to the Middle Ages

Mikael Males

The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief overview of the development of and preconditions for medieval etymology and wordplay. First, explicit arguments about etymology and the etymological method itself will be surveyed. Etymology can be defined as the most explicit form of wordplay from Antiquity through the Middle Ages, and it was also the locus of debates on the epistemic value of language. For these reasons, the main analysis will center on etymology. Thereafter, a synoptic perspective on opinions on and uses of etymology and wordplay in one of the most formative authors for the Middle Ages, St Augustine, will be presented. The aim of this section is to show how theoretical arguments regarding the epistemic value of words did not necessarily interfere with cognitive and interpretive practices, even in the same author. In contrast to most studies of medieval etymology, both sections contain examples drawn from exegetic literature. The influence of exegetic and homiletic texts on the development of etymology has, I believe, often been underrated, and the rich use of etymology and wordplay by the greatest Doctors of the Church may help explain why such devices were seen as appropriate even to the highest levels of discourse throughout the Middle Ages. By this choice, then, I hope to provide some influential examples of etymology and wordplay, outside of Isidore's *Etymologiae*, that were bequeathed to the Middle Ages.

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Conventionalism and Naturalism

Before going on to specifics about etymology, a brief outline will be given of opinions on whether the sound of a word was essential to its meaning or not. The perception that phonetics are merely dictated by convention will be referred to as *conventionalism*, whereas *naturalism* posits an essential or natural connection between the qualities of signifier and signified. The question is of fundamental importance to perceptions of what etymology and paronomasia can be used for.

The starting point for most overviews of etymology in Antiquity is Plato's *Cratylus*. In it, two of the interlocutors, Cratylus and Hermogenes, represent two diametrically different opinions. Cratylus thinks that words have the nature of the designated object embedded in them, whereas Hermogenes claims that words are merely a matter of convention and that, if we decided to exchange one word for another, the new word would be equally true to the designated object. Socrates, the third speaker, strikes a middle position, though he leans somewhat more towards Cratylus. Three quarters of the dialogue are spent convincing Hermogenes that names are not arbitrary but have been assigned by wise namegivers. Socrates unveils the background of many names through comparison with words with a more or less similar ring to them. He explains, for instance, that the earliest Greeks believed only in the celestial bodies. They saw that these were always moving, and hence gods are called θεοί (gods) ἀπὸ ταύτης τῆς φύσεως τῆς τοῦ θεῖν ('because of their running nature').[1] Plato seems to think that most words can be explained by such analogies, but that at least a core lexicon is founded on a connection between sound and thing (or ideal thing, though Plato's theory of ideas is not prominent in *Cratylus*). The most obvious case is onomatopoetic words, such as βῆτα, the name of the letter β, which begins with the sound of the letter itself.[2] These are, however, quickly dealt with, whereas more complex relationships between linguistic sound and reality are discussed at length. For instance, Socrates explains that early namegivers found the letter *rho* useful to express motion, since the tongue is least at rest when pronouncing that letter, and it therefore figures prominently in verbs of motion.[3] The letter *iota* (*I*), in turn, is used for anything subtle that can most easily pass through all things.[4] Here, it may be noted, Plato seems

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[1] Plato, *Cratylus* 397 d, ed. and trans. by Fowler, pp. 52–53.

[2] Plato, *Cratylus* 393 e, ed. and trans. by Fowler, pp. 40–41.

[3] Plato, *Cratylus* 426 c–e, ed. and trans. by Fowler, pp. 144–45.

[4] Plato, *Cratylus* 426 e–427 a, ed. and trans. by Fowler, pp. 144–47.

not only to be talking about the sound of the letter, but equally much or more so about its narrow shape. Plato, like most grammarians of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, does not clearly distinguish between the name, sign, and sound of letters.[5] This is one of many factors which contributed to making etymology into an extremely flexible tool of interpretation.

In response to Cratylus, Socrates points out that just like artists, namegivers can be good or poor at representing reality. For this reason, words are not always phonosemantically true to what they signify and any inquiry into the true nature of things must therefore begin with the things themselves, rather than the words for them.[6] Nonetheless, the tenor of Socrates's argument indicates that Plato thought that the etymological method works, even though it is not the best one for philosophical enquiry.[7] It should be noted here that before the publication of David Sedley's *Plato's 'Cratylus'* in 2003, scholars generally assumed that Plato could not have believed in the etymologies he presented. Through comparison with other dialogues and philosophers, Sedley demonstrates that etymologies, also what are now considered to be false ones, were integral to Plato's analysis in *Cratylus* and elsewhere.[8] Sedley is thus an important precursor to the studies contained in this book, where etymology and wordplay are often assumed to be used in earnest.

Even though *Cratylus* had no direct influence in the Latin West before Marsilio Ficino's translation (published in 1484), the dialogue is valuable for clarifying assumptions about the relationship between words and things that are often left implicit in the etymological tradition. The naturalist position that developed would not be that of Cratylus, but that of Socrates; as we shall see in Isidore, not all words were believed to carry essential links to reality. *Cratylus* is rare in spelling out how these links were perceived, as in the case of *rho* and *iota*. Similar arguments are put forward in Augustine's *De dialectica*, where it is argued that, for instance, *vis* is so called because the powerful sound of the word is congruent with its meaning 'power'.[9] In other cases, the argument is more vaguely expressed, as when Isidore states that words were first imposed

[5] *Pace* Law, *The History of Linguistics in Europe*, p. 61. Priscian on occasion recognizes the difference between sign and sound (*littera* and *elementum*) (*Institutiones* I. 4), but at other times the two are hopelessly confused, and most grammarians were less stringent than he in this regard.

[6] Plato, *Cratylus* 439 b, ed. and trans. by Fowler, pp. 186–87.

[7] Sedley, *Plato's 'Cratylus'*, p. 34.

[8] Sedley, *Plato's 'Cratylus'*, pp. 25–50.

[9] Augustine, *De dialectica* 6, ed. by Pinborg, trans. by Jackson, pp. 98–99.

on things according to the nature of the thing in question (*secundum naturam*, *secundum qualitatem* in the quotation below).

Naturalism had its critics from Hermogenes onwards. Conspicuous among these are Quintilian, Sextus Empiricus, and Augustine, all of whom question or ridicule etymological exegesis.[10] Quintilian's critique is based on common sense; the older and more correct form of a word may be established through etymology, but from his description it is clear that proceeding beyond that point produces results that are merely silly.[11] Sextus was a sceptic, and as such it is not surprising that he should claim that 'the pretensions of Hellenistic and Stoic grammarians are like the Sirens' songs'.[12] Nonetheless, he accepts some etymologies that would now be considered to be fanciful.[13] More importantly for the Middle Ages, Augustine argues in *De dialectica* that etymology tends to become a circular argument where words explain other words, rather than actually tying into reality. He also maintains that the several etymologies that are often given for the same word indicate that the etymologists' claims to truth are tenuous at best.[14] It should be noted, though, that Augustine's critique is not unambiguous, as is indicated by how he, in the same passage, explains the powerful sound of *vis* by reference to its meaning 'power'. Furthermore, as we shall see below, Augustine often disregarded these theoretical observations in his own literary practice. Also Boethius, with his translation of and commentary on Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* (*De interpretatione*), was an important proponent of the notion of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. This work experienced a revival in the High Middle Ages and was central to Peter Abelard's inquiries into the question of universals.[15]

In spite of these critiques, naturalism was the common position throughout the Middle Ages, at least outside of philosophical discourse. Even within that discourse, moderate conventionalists like Abelard and John of Salisbury believed that words imitate things, a position that in practice allows for much the same uses of language as a naturalist view.[16] For that reason, the natural-

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[10] Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, pp. 31–56.

[11] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.28–38, ed. and trans. by Butler, i, 122–30.

[12] Quoted in Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, p. 42.

[13] Sedley, *Plato's 'Cratulys'*, p. 35.

[14] Augustine, *De dialectica* 6, ed. by Pinborg, trans. by Jackson, pp. 90–99.

[15] Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, ii.1, 424–25; on the renewed study of *Peri hermeneias* in the West, see Isaac, *Le Peri hermeneias en occident de Boèce a saint Thomas*, pp. 53, 59–60, and passim.

[16] Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, pp. 48–49.

ist position provides the general background to the analyses of this book. This choice of perspective is not entirely uncontroversial, since some medievalists maintain that naturalism was never very common, or that it largely disappeared in the High Middle Ages.[17] That argument is partly based on changes within the etymological method that occurred in some contexts in the high medieval period. As the question is of fundamental import to the topic of this book, these methodological aspects will be dealt with at some length in the next section. Here, a few remarks on an issue that is often overlooked in the discussion of naturalism in the Middle Ages may suffice.

The only unqualified naturalist in Western literature is Cratylus; Plato obviously wanted two diametrically opposing positions between which Socrates could mediate. No philosopher has proposed that the sound of every word in an existing language can be correlated to reality. In the Middle Ages, this was believed to have been the case with the language spoken before the division of the tongues at the Tower of Babel (often understood as Hebrew), and that this 'perfect fit' would be regained after the Day of Judgement.[18] Idolatry arose as a consequence of the confusion induced by the lack of corresponence between words and things.[19] Absolute naturalism was thus not an option after Babel. As we shall see in Isidore, though, it was still thought that naturalist principles were fundamental to our languages, but that chance also played a considerable role.[20]

Variations on this story, and interpretations of it, were spread all over Europe throughout the Middle Ages, in Latin and in the vernaculars. It does not figure prominently in the etymological discourse, though it is sometimes attached to grammatical works.[21] In the present book, the perspective is not restricted to

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[17] Reynolds, *Medieval Reading*, pp. 81–87; somewhat more conditional is Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, pp. 16, 69. Myles, *Chaucerian Realism*, pp. 1–16, is quite polemic and claims that signs were seen as arbitrary by all scholastic philosophers (p. 4). In Vance, *Mervelous Signals*, p. 258, this view is given of all medieval people.

[18] Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, I, 6–7 and passim.

[19] Thus, for instance, Peter Comestor, *Historia scholastica. Liber Genesis* 40 (ed. by Sylwan, p. 76).

[20] For a balanced view on the relationship between conventionalism and naturalism and the power of etymology in the Middle Ages, see Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, pp. 46–49, 53–54.

[21] Thus, for instance, the Old Irish *Auraicept na n-Éces* (The Scholars' Primer), where Irish (the language, as well as its poetic variety) is described as the best of languages, since it is composed of all the seventy-two languages at the Tower of Babel (*Auraicept na n-Éces. The Scholars' Primer*, ed. by Calder, pp. 2–21). The Babel story is also referred to in a grammatical context in the Old Norse Codex Wormianus (*c.* 1350) (see Males, 'Wormianusredaktören').

etymology as a discipline, but rather to phonetic similarity as a conveyer of meaning, and the Babel narrative is valuable as an indicator of how semantics may have been perceived outside of technical discourse. The narrative could in principle be enrolled in support of conventionalism, since we live after Babel, but I would contend that its widespread use in the Middle Ages is rather indicative of the contrary: The foundation of language lies in the essential match of words to things, and even though that foundation has partly crumbled through linguistic fragmentation, God has seen to it that language, just like the rest of Creation, can still reveal some of its true origin to an inspired interpreter.[22] Thus, for instance, Jerome could extract the Hebrew meanings out of Latin and Greek words which from our perspective have nothing to do with Hebrew.[23]

In modern studies, the complex of perceptions that formed around the Babel narrative is rarely mentioned in connection to medieval etymology and the relationship between conventionalism and naturalism. I believe, however, that it is an important background motif for appreciating how God was thought to have left traces of truth embedded in the various languages.

The Development of Etymology

Etymology is the study of 'true words' or 'true discourse' (ἐτυμολογία < ἔτυμος (true) and λόγος (word, discourse)). Cicero's literal translation of the term into Latin was *veriloquium* (true utterance).[24] As noted in the Introduction, medieval and modern scholars are at variance with regard to what kind of truth in words they think should be studied or what can be considered true at all. Here, a brief outline of etymological practice from Antiquity through the Middle Ages will be given.[25]

The function of etymology varied greatly with its context, and this is particularly true of Antiquity. Grammarians would use it as a guide to orthography

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[22] Similarly, though with reference to Isidore's view on language in particular, Fontaine, 'Cohérence et originalité de l'etymologie Isidorienne', pp. 138–39; cf. Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, p. 54: 'To signify properly is [...] to recapture the essence of things before the Fall. [...] This is why the practice of etymology is so important'.

[23] See Kelly, *Jerome*, pp. 153–54.

[24] Cicero, *Topica* 8.35, ed. and trans. by Hubbell, pp. 408–09. Cicero, though, prefers using the term *notatio* (notation), translating the Greek σύμβολον, as he finds that it has a more natural ring in Latin and is more apt.

[25] Fundamental treatments of the subject are Opelt, 'Etymologie'; Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*; Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters* (High Middle Ages).

and choice of words and as a tool for the interpretation of texts. Rhetoricians employed it to lead their argument into proof. Poets used it for learned and playful allusions.[26] Etymology could also serve as a mnemonic aid.[27] As in the case of wordplay generally, a reductive definition of the functions of etymology should therefore be avoided.

Ancient and medieval etymology was enacted in four ways: a loan word could be translated (*interpretatio*), a compound word could be analysed in its constituent parts (*compositio*), a derived form could be traced to its primary form (*derivatio*), and a word could be analysed through association to another word that was partly similar either in sound or in meaning (*expositio*).[28] In practice, these strategies were often mixed. More importantly, the last of them, connecting words through sound or meaning, is today no longer seen as valid if it is not supported by further evidence (sound laws, early sources, etc.). In the Middle Ages, it could function much like any other kind of textual exposition.

Even though only one of the four procedures differs fundamentally from the practice of modern etymology, such a statement does not give an accurate impression of how different medieval etymology was from its modern counterpart, since the expositive mode dominated the etymological landscape. When connecting similar words, several types of changes were recognized as permissible. In Quintilian's words: 'aut correptis aut porrectis, aut adiectis aut detractis, aut permutatis litteris syllabisve' (either by shortening or lengthening, by adding or detracting, or by changing letters or syllables).[29] That is, one could

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[26] Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, p. 8; Opelt, 'Etymologie', col. 798.

[27] Carruthers, 'Inventional Mnemonics and the Ornaments of Style'; Isidore of Seville, *The 'Etymologies'*, trans. by Barney and others, p. 24. One explicit mention of etymology as a mnemonic aid has not, as far as I am aware, been discussed in this context, namely Varro, *On the Latin Language* 8.5, ed. by Henderson, trans. by Kent, II, 374–75: 'Imposticia nomina esse voluerunt quam paucissima, quo citius ediscere possent, declinata quam plurima, quo facilius omnes quibus ad usum opus esset dicerent' (They [grammarians, speakers] have wanted the imposed nouns to be as few as possible, so that they can be quickly learned, and the derivative nouns to be as many as possible, so that they could all more easily say [the nouns] which they needed to use). (All Latin translations are mine, even where other translators are indicated.) The claim here is that as few words as possible should be analysed etymologically, which to Varro means that the explanation is semantic rather than formal. As many nouns as possible should, on the other hand, be analysed as derivatives (*declinata*) for the verbal inventory to be sorted and hanged onto as few mnemonic pegs as possible.

[28] Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, p. 23, based on Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, pp. 45–70.

[29] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.32, ed. and trans. by Butler, I, 126; see also Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, p. 19.

alter the quantity of, or add, or remove, or simply change a letter/phoneme or a syllable. To give a few examples from Isidore: *anus* (old woman) from *annus* (year) with the detraction or shortening of a letter,[30] *scire* (know) from *discere* (learn) with the removal of a syllable,[31] *lupanar* (brothel) from *lupa* (she-wolf) with the addition of a syllable,[32] *homo* (human being) from *humus* (earth) with change of the root vowel.[33]

Similar categories of change later recur as barbarisms, that is, linguistic changes that are to be avoided in proper Latin.[34] This is hardly a coincidence. In Antiquity, some rhetoricians, grammarians, and sceptics saw etymology mainly as a way to arrive at the proper form or meaning of a word.[35] Mark E. Amsler, drawing on Pompeius Empiricus, has termed this restricted and normative use of etymology *technical etymology*, as opposed to *exegetical etymology*, where the links between words acted as pointers to interpretation, whether it be historical (ancient customs, etc., explaining the meaning of a word) or allegorical.[36] In Antiquity, the main proponents of exegetical etymology were the Stoics. After Antiquity, technical etymologists were not in a position to challenge the validity of exegetical etymology before the modern era.[37]

To the Stoics, etymology was a means to retrieve congenial meaning in Homeric texts. Taking the myths as literally true seemed absurd to them, and they would rather quarry the texts for moral meaning and information about the natural world. One means to arrive at such meaning was to etymologize the names of gods (this is done extensively in *Cratylus* as well). Cleanthes (*c.* 331–*c.* 232 BC), for instance, says that Apollo (Ἀπόλλων) represents the sun because the sun rises from different points (ἀπ᾽ ἄλλων καὶ ἄλλων τόπων).[38] Chrysippus (*c.* 279–*c.* 206 BC), by contrast, sees the name as derived from a privative α- and the plural genitive 'of many' (πολλῶν), indicating that Apollo, that is, the sun, is the one fire separated from the many.[39] The name of the god, then, is really a

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[30] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 11.2.28, ed. by Lindsay.

[31] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1.1.1, ed. by Lindsay.

[32] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 18.42.2, ed. by Lindsay.

[33] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1.29.3, ed. by Lindsay.

[34] Donatus, *Ars maior* 3.1, ed. by Holtz, pp. 653–54.

[35] Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, pp. 19, 24, 42.

[36] Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, p. 25.

[37] Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, p. 16.

[38] Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie*, p. 128.

[39] Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie*, p. 129.

code for conveying truths about the natural world to those endowed with sufficient wisdom to retreive the message. Similar methods were also employed by Neoplatonists, who contributed to transmitting them to the Latin Middle Ages.[40]

In Latin, the most prominent etymologian of Antiquity was Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BC) who, in his *De lingua latina*, was the first to formulate a model in either Greek or Latin that incorporated both technical and exegetical etymology.[41] *De lingua latina* seems not to have been known as a continuous text in its own right in the Middle Ages; it survived into the Renaissance in a single eleventh-century manuscript from Montecassino, and renewed interest in it is only evident from Giovanni Boccaccio onwards.[42] Though its direct influence on medieval etymology is thus all but non-existent, the work is of fundamental importance for understanding the development of etymological theory and practice.

The first three books of *De lingua latina*, where Varro produced arguments against, for, and about the discipline of etymology, are now lost.[43] Nonetheless, it is clear that he believed that it was possible to find out why things carry the phonetic labels that they do: 'In his ad te scribam, a quibus rebus vocabula imposita sint in lingua Latina' (In the following books, I shall write to you from what things words have been imposed [on other things] in Latin).[44] This statement presupposes a naturalist belief in an essential word–thing relationship; some things are by nature connected to certain words, and from these words many more can be construed and applied to other things. Words, according to Varro, have these two and only these two origins: the first imposition (*impositio*) of a word on a thing and derivation (*declinatio*), that is, words and forms that are derived from a primary word.[45] The second stage in this process — the

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[40] Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, pp. 38–41, 280–82.

[41] Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, p. 25.

[42] Reynolds, *Texts and Transmission*, pp. 430–31; Varro, *On the Latin Language*, ed. by Henderson, trans. by Kent, pp. xii–xvii.

[43] See Varro, *On the Latin Language* 5.1, ed. by Henderson, trans. by Kent, I, 2–3.

[44] Varro, *On the Latin Language* 5.1, ed. by Henderson, trans. by Kent, I, 2–3.

[45] Varro, *On the Latin Language* 8.5, ed. by Henderson, trans. by Kent, II, 374–75: 'Duo igitur omnino verborum principia, impositio et declinatio, alterum ut fons, alterum ut rivus. Imposticia nomina esse voluerunt quam paucissima, quo citius ediscere possent, declinata quam plurima, quo facilius omnes quibus ad usum opus esset dicerent' (The origins of words are two and no more, imposition and declination/derivation, the one as a source, the other as a brook. They [grammarians, speakers] have wanted the imposed nouns to be as few as possible, so that

production of new words from primary words and the application of them to things — Varro does not see as the object of etymological study. These two origins correspond to the two sections of the extant *De lingua latina*. The etymological portions of the work (Books v–vii) are descriptive and explanatory, whereas the remainder (Books viii–x), treating *declinatio*, is prescriptive and straddles the disciplines of *grammatica* and *rhetorica* (though Varro does not explicitly say so). Whereas *etymologia* is all about finding the reason for the first *impositio* of a word, *declinatio* can be subdivided into *declinatio voluntaria* — derivations from the same verbal root, that is, what we today would generally refer to as etymology — and *declinatio naturalis*: declination of both nouns and verbs.[46]

Varro's etymologies, in his sense of the word, are deeply indebted to the Stoics (he says himself that he has studied Cleanthes).[47] Thus, for instance, Iuno Lucina (Juno as goddess of childbirth) is explained as 'ficta ab iuvando et luce Iuno Lucina' ([the name] Iuno Lucina is made from 'to help' (*iuvando*) and 'light' (*luce*)):[48] The *light* of the moon *helps* in conception and in measuring the time of the pregnancy, until the child is brought out into the *light*. Unlike the Stoics and Alexandrian grammarians, though, Varro widened the scope of etymology to discuss not only the names of supernatural beings and proper forms of words in Homer; though the main subjects of Books v–vii are places,

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they can be quickly learned, and the derivative nouns to be as many as possible, so that they could all more easily say [the nouns] which they needed to use).

[46] Varro, *On the Latin Language* 8.21–22, ed. by Henderson, trans. by Kent, ii, 388–89: 'Declinationum genera sunt duo, voluntarium et naturale; voluntarium est, quo ut cuiusque tulit voluntas declinavit. Sic tres cum emerunt Ephesi singulos servos, nonnunquam alius declinat nomen ab eo qui vendit Artemidorus, atque Artemam appellat, alius a regione quod ibi emit, ab Ionia Iona [...]. Contra naturalem declinationem dico quae non a singulorum oritur voluntate, sed a communi consensu. Itaque omnes impositis nominibus eorum item declinant casus atque eodem modo dicunt: huius Artemidori et huius Ionis [...] sic in casibus aliis.' (There are two kinds of *declinatio*, voluntary and natural; by voluntary *declinatio*, each person's will guides the derivation. Thus, when three persons had bought a slave each in Ephesos, sometimes one derives the name from the one who sold the slave, Artemidorus, and calls him Artemas, another from the region and calls him Ion from Ionia, since he had bought him there [...]. On the other hand, with natural *declinatio* I intend such names as do not rise from personal whim, but from common consent. Thus, when their names have been imposed, everyone declines the cases similarly and say them in the same way: *huius Artemidori* and *huius Ionis* [...] and similarly in other cases.)

[47] Varro, *On the Latin Language* 5.9, ed. by Henderson, trans. by Kent, i, 10–11.

[48] Varro, *On the Latin Language* 5.69, ed. by Henderson, trans. by Kent, i, 66–67.

time, and poetic diction, in practice he treats all kinds of nouns.[49] The result is a treatise of an encyclopaedic character, a development that is borne to full fruition by Isidore.

Isidore's (d. 636) *Etymologiae* or *Origines* were, in contrast to *De lingua latina*, a widespread work of reference throughout the Middle Ages; indeed, its influence has been described as second only to that of the Bible.[50] Nearly a thousand manuscripts containing all or parts of the *Etymologiae* have been preserved, and nearly a dozen printings appeared before 1500.[51] The interpretive strategies that dominate the *Etymologiae* are to be found in most types of narrative and exegetical literature in the Middle Ages.[52]

Isidore had probably not studied *De lingua latina* at first hand. Rather, his combination of etymology and encyclopaedism was taken over from a broad variety of late antique sources.[53] He subsumes derivation under etymology, providing an extremely flexible tool for retrieving the meanings of words. This is how he defines *etymologia*:

Etymologia est origo vocabulorum, cum vis verbi vel nominis per interpretationem colligitur. Hanc Aristoteles σύμβολον, Cicero adnotationem nominavit, quia nomina et verba rerum nota facit exemplo posito; utputa flumen, quia fluendo crevit, a fluendo dictum. Cuius cognitio saepe usum necessarium habet in interpretatione sua. Nam dum videris unde ortum est nomen, citius vim eius intelligis. Omnis enim rei inspectio etymologia cognita planior est.[54]

[Etymology is the origin of words, when the force [i.e. meaning] of a verb or noun is established through interpretation. Aristotle called this σύμβολον, Cicero *adnotatio*, since it makes the nouns and verbs for things known (*nota*) by giving an example, for instance 'river' (*flumen*) is called from 'flowing' (*fluendo*) because it

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[49] This widened scope is commented upon in Varro, *On the Latin Language* 5.9, ed. by Henderson, trans. by Kent, I, 10–11.

[50] Isidore, *The 'Etymologies'*, trans. by Barney and others, p. 3.

[51] Isidore, *The 'Etymologies'*, trans. by Barney and others, p. 24. In his survey of the partial or complete manuscripts of the *Etymologiae*, Fernandez Caton lists 967 of them (*Las Etimologias en la tradicion manuscrita medieval*).

[52] The main argument of Henderson, *The Medieval World of Isidore of Seville*, is that the *Etymologiae* were not used as a dictionary, a use which only modern indexing has made possible, but rather as a full curriculum. This observation may have some bearing on how the impact of the *Etymologiae* came to be so profound.

[53] Isidore, *The 'Etymologies'*, trans. by Barney and others, pp. 13–14; Fontaine, 'Isidore de Séville et la mutation de l'encyclopédisme antique', pp. 528–29.

[54] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1.29, ed. by Lindsay.

grows by flowing (*fluendo*). The knowledge of this is often necessary for interpretation, since, once you see from where a word arises, you more readily understand its meaning. The scrutiny of each thing is facilitated when the etymology is known.]

There are several points of interest here. Most importantly, the passage clarifies a fundamental difference between premodern and modern perceptions of etymology. Isidore's use of the word *origin* (*origo*) of words may lead the modern reader to think in terms of the genetic, diachronic origins of verbal forms, as in modern etymology. This formulation, however, is a false friend, since form to Isidore was completely ancillary to meaning. The next clause makes it clear that the origins in question are semantic; 'origin' here means something like 'cause', rather than 'historical background'. This does not rule out some diachronic awareness, but it is all too easy to understand a formulation like 'from where a word arises' as a strictly genetic statement. Isidore's many etymologies where several origins are given, which from a genetic point of view are mutually exclusive, clearly demonstrate that it is the essential relationship between sound and meaning — not the formal development of linguistic items — that is the main object of his queries. This perspective was retained throughout the Middle Ages, and a lacking awareness of this difference between us and them has led to much scholarly ink being spilled on blaming medieval intellectuals for failing to achieve what they never set out to do, namely modern etymology.

Furthermore, the words of Cicero are twisted somewhat to suit Isidore's purpose. The reference is to *Topica* 8.35, where we read:

> Multa enim ex notatione sumuntur. Ea est autem, cum vi nominis argumentum elicitur; quam Graeci ἐτυμολογίαν appellant, id est verbum ex verbo veriloquium; nos autem novitatem verbi non satis apti fugientes genus hoc notationem appellamus, quia sunt verba rerum notae. Itaque hoc quidem Aristoteles σύμβολον appellat, quod Latine est nota.[55]

> [Many arguments are taken from *notatio* [etymology]. It is etymology, when an argument is produced from the meaning of a word. This the Greeks call ἐτυμολογία, which literally means 'true utterance'. We, however, avoiding the strangeness of a word that is not sufficiently suitable, call this *notatio*, because words are the *notae* [labels] of things. Similarly, Aristotle calls this σύμβολον, which is *nota* [label] in Latin.]

Cicero seems to find the meaning 'true utterance' vague, and since arguments from etymology in a premodern sense are arguments from what words signify, he chooses a word that puts the word–thing relationship into focus, namely

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[55] Cicero, *Topica* 8.35, ed. and trans. by Hubbell, p. 408.

nota 'label'. This is quite straightforward, but Isidore wishes rather to focus on how the word–thing relationship is elucidated through the interconnectedness of words. In the *Etymologiae*, the word *nota* is retained to account for the name *adnotatio*, though no longer as a noun 'label', but as an adjective 'known', and focus has now shifted to the procedure of understanding words through other words ('by giving an example'). The expansion of *notatio* to *adnotatio* serves the same purpose; one word is added (*ad-*) to another, making it 'known', rather than acting as a mere label to a thing.[56] To Isidore, a phonosemantic web ties things and words and yet other words together.

Isidore continues:

> Non autem omnia nomina a veteribus secundum naturam inposita sunt, sed quaedam et secundum placitum, sicut et nos servis et possessionibus interdum secundum quod placet nostrae voluntati nomina damus. Hinc est quod omnium nominum etymologiae non reperiuntur, quia quaedam non secundum qualitatem, qua genita sunt, sed iuxta arbitrium humanae voluntatis vocabula acceperunt. Sunt autem etymologiae nominum aut ex causa datae, ut 'reges' a regendo et recte agendo, aut ex origine, ut homo, quia sit ex humo, aut ex contrariis ut a lavando lutum, dum lutum non sit mundum, et lucus, quia umbra opacus parum luceat. Quaedam etiam facta sunt ex nominum derivatione, ut a prudentia prudens; quaedam etiam ex vocibus, ut a garrulitate garrulus; quaedam ex graeca etymologia orta et declinata sunt in latinum, ut silva, domus.[57]

> [Not all words, however, have been imposed by the ancients according to nature, but some have also been given arbitrarily, just as we too sometimes give names to slaves and possessions according to what we find pleasing. This is the reason why the etymology of all words cannot be recovered, since some of them have received their words not according to the quality that gave rise to them, but rather in accordance with a decision of the human will. There are, however, etymologies of words that are given in accordance with their cause, like 'kings' (*reges*) from ruling (*regendo*) and acting rightly (*recte agendo*), or from their origin, like 'man' (*homo*), since he comes from earth (*humo*), or from their contrary, like 'mud' (*lutum*) from 'to clean' (*lavando*), because mud is not clean, and 'grove' (*lucus*) because it is darkened by shadow and 'gives little light' (*parum luceat*). Some words are construed through derivation from nouns, like 'prudent' (*prudens*) from 'prudence' (*prudentia*), some also from sounds, such as 'chattering' (*garrulus*) from 'chatter' (*garrulitate*), some have their origin in Greek etymology and are adapted to suit the Latin language, such as 'forest' (*silva*), 'house' (*domus*).]

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[56] Fontaine, 'Cohérence et originalité de l'etymologie Isidorienne', p. 120, also analyses the change to *adnotatio* as indicative of Isidore's mode of doing etymology.

[57] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1.29, ed. by Lindsay.

Isidore admits that some names have been imposed arbitrarily, so that the phonosemantic connection has been severed and their etymology is not recoverable. To judge by the tenor of the *Etymologiae*, though, this state of affairs posed few problems in practice; clearly, most words were not imposed 'in accordance with a decision of the human will', but rather 'according to nature'. He does not distinguish what we would consider to be the one case where the relation between signifier and signified is not arbitrary, namely the onomatopoetic *garrulitas*, from other etymological categories; to Isidore, all of these etymologies are equally natural. This legacy he will pass on to posterity.

In contrast to Varro, Isidore does not see derivation as fundamentally different from other 'origins' of words. The one category that really stands out is loan words. Their etymology, that is, their semantic rationale, is recoverable only internally in the source language.

In the High Middle Ages, changes occurred within the etymological discourse. With Papias's *Elementarium doctrinae* (*c.* 1050), lexicography emerged on a grand scale, and with two of his successor lexicographers, Osbern of Glouchester (*Derivationes*, *c.* 1150–80) and Hugutio of Pisa (*Derivationes*, late twelfth century, dependent on Osbern), a distinction reminiscent of Varro's between *etymologia* and *declinatio* resurfaced. This time, though, the term used was *derivatio*, referring to what Varro had called *declinatio voluntaria* (though the distinction was not always upheld with the same rigour as in Varro).[58] Hugutio of Pisa's *Derivationes* were very influential and may serve as an example of the new distinction. Under each heading, *derivatio* is given first and then, if required, *etymologia* and finally *compositio*. Thus, under the heading *iuvo* 'help', the name Iovis or Iupiter is first explained as derived from *iuvo*, after which Hugutio adds 'vel sit etymologia' (or it may be an etymology), in which case it is explained 'quasi iuvans pater' (as if it were 'helping father') or 'quasi iuris pater' (as if it were 'father of jurisprudence'). At the end of the heading, compounds of *iuvo*, such as the synonym *adiuvo*, are given.[59]

Even within exegetical etymology, excluding the categories of derivation, composition, and translation, changes were taking place. These can best be illustrated by quoting Johannes Balbus's *Catholicon*, the fourth major dictionary of the Middle Ages (finished in 1286). Under the heading *Etymologia*,

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[58] Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, p. 17. A good and concise overview of the new trend is Hunt, 'The "Lost" Preface to the "Liber Derivationum" of Osbern of Glouchester'. Most of the Latin texts quoted there are translated in *Medieval Grammar & Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, pp. 349–58.

[59] Uguccione da Pisa, *Derivationes* 2, ed. by Cecchini and others, pp. 631–33.

Balbus says that etymology 'alludit enim significationi trahendo argumentum per litteras vel sillabas aliunde' (alludes to the meaning [of a word] by drawing the argument through letters or syllables from elsewhere), since 'omnis dictio etymologizari possit dummodo velit aliquis meditari' (every word can be etymologized as long as someone is willing to meditate on it).[60] One of his examples may suffice: *Deus* 'God', '**d**ans **e**ternam **u**itam **s**uis' (bestowing eternal life unto his own).

Balbus's description differs from Isidore's in two interrelated ways. First, as we have seen, Isidore does not claim that every word can be etymologized. Furthermore, explaining one word with the initial letters of several words, as in Balbus's etymology of *Deus*, does not occur in etymologies before the High Middle Ages. Etymologies based on syllables drawn from several words (as in 'catenae quod se **ca**piendo **ten**eant plurimis nodis (chain, because its many links catch hold of each other)) do occur in Isidore and even earlier, but become much more frequent in the High Middle Ages.[61]

The difference between Isidore and Balbus is not just a matter of wording. The methodology has been adapted so that every word can be etymologized in accordance with the requirements of textual exegesis. Truth is still part of the equation, but now there is more emphasis on the truth that the exegete arrives at with the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit, as opposed to the truth of phonetic reflections of reality to be decoded by the etymologist. This shift in emphasis is, to the best of my knowledge, not clearly commented upon in medieval literature, but is perhaps best exemplified in Thomas Cisterciencis's commentary on the Song of Songs (*c.* 1190).[62] Here follows his description of the etymologies of *flos* (flower):

> Et hoc iuxta quatuor huius nominis etymologias. Secundum primam acceptionem dicitur flos quasi **f**eni **l**abens **o**nor **s**eorsum. Secundum significationem secundam dicitur flos **f**undens **l**ate **o**dorem **s**uum. Iuxta tertiam significationem dicitur flos, scilicet **f**ructus **l**ibans **o**pem **s**equentis. Secundum quartam acceptionem dicitur flos, scilicet **f**aciens **l**aetum **o**dorem **s**uavitatis.[63]

[60] Johannes Balbus, *Catholicon*, p. 17va. See also translation and commentary in *Medieval Grammar & Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, p. 362. Balbus's argument is that *etymologia* is not *derivatio*, since not all words can be derived, whereas all words can be etymologized.

[61] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 5.27.9, ed. by Lindsay.

[62] See Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, pp. 68–69, 161–69.

[63] Thomas the Cistercian, In Cantica Canticorum eruditissimi commentarii, ed. by Migne, col. 182B.

[And this [the allegorical meanings of *flos*] is in accordance with the etymologies of the word. According to the first way of understanding it we say *flos* as if it were 'the honour of the hay, leaning its own way'. According to the second signification we say *flos* [as if it were] 'spreading its fragrance far and wide'. By the third signification we say *flos*, that is 'pouring out the riches of the harvest to come'. According to the fourth way of understanding it we say *flos*, that is 'producing a joyous fragrance of sweetness'.]

According to Thomas, these etymologies signify, in order: vanity, the grace and sweetness of virtue, the hope of reward (*fructus*, in accordance with the imagery), and the pleasures of heaven.

This mode of etymologizing draws the exegetical possibilities inherent in the Isidorean model to their extreme and thus makes of etymology an even more finely honed instrument for meditation on holy texts. The new tendencies were not, however, restricted to exegesis; in Hugutio, for instance, syllabic etymologies have replaced many of Isidore's word-to-word etymologies (for instance 'delubrum quasi **dilu**ens pro**br**a' (temple as if it were rebutting the accusations) for Isidore's 'delubra a diluendo' (temples from washing away)).[64]

The methodological antecedents to these developments have not, as far as I am aware, been discussed by scholars but are probably to be sought, precisely, within the exegetical tradition. In commentaries on biblical texts, single letters could be interpreted in several ways. One of these is the Hebrew tradition of interpreting letters numerically (*gematria*), which was taken over by the Greek and thence the Latin Church Fathers. Here is an example from Bede's commentary on Luke:

> Iesus 'salvator' interpretatur [...]. Cuius sacrosancti nominis non tantum etymologia, sed et ipse quem litteris comprehendit numerus, perpetuae nostrae salutis mysteria redolet. Sex quippe litteris apud Graecos scribitur Ἰησοῦς, videlicet ι et η et σ et ο et υ, ς, quarum numeri sunt X et VIII et CC et LXX et CCCC et CC, qui fiunt simul DCCCLXXXVIII. Qui profecto numerus, quia figurae resurrectionis adgaudeat, satis est supra tractatum.[65]

> [Jesus means 'saviour' [...]. Not only the etymology, but also the number of this sacrosanct name, which it encompasses with its letters, smells of the mysteries of our eternal salvation. Ἰησοῦς is written with six letters among the Greeks, namely ι and η and σ and ο and υ, ς, whose numbers are 10 and 8 and 200 and 70 and 400 and 200, which together makes 888. This number is sufficiently treated above, since

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[64] Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, p. 68 n. 135.

[65] Bede, *In Lucae evangelium expositio*, ed. by Migne, col. 338B–C.

it takes delight in the figure of resurrection [i.e. delights in signifying the resurrection/Christ as a symbol of resurrection].]

Despite the sufficient attention he claims to have devoted to the subject, Bede is in fact far from done with the meaning of this number and continues to expound at length on its wonderful implications. His method is, however, clear from the passage above. First, he gives the etymology. Then he gives the numerical value of the Greek letters, after which he can delve into numerology, and the two methods thus work in tandem in the interpretation, the saviour of the etymology saving us to the resurrection indicated by the numbers. The step from here to integrating the two methods to etymologize the individual letters is not great. There are, however, examples of pure initial letter etymology also in the early exegetical tradition, albeit not for all letters in a word. In Jerome's letter 30 he etymologizes the initial letters of the acrostic psalms (the psalms where each section begins in a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, i.e. Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145):

> Aleph interpretatur 'doctrina', Beth 'domus', Gemel 'plenitudo', Deleth 'tabularum' [...]. Post interpretationem elementorum intelligentiae ordo dicendus est: Aleph, Beth, Gemel, Deleth prima connexio est, 'doctrina', 'domus', 'plenitudo', 'tabularum'; quod videlicet doctrina Ecclesiae, quae domus Dei est, in librorum reperiatur plenitudine divinorum.[66]

> [Aleph means 'doctrine', Beth 'house', Gemel 'fullness', Deleth 'of the tablets' [...]. After the interpretation of the letters the order of their understanding is to be stated: Aleph, Beth, Gemel, Deleth is the first cluster: *doctrina*, *domus*, *plenitudo*, *tabularum*, which obviously [means that] the doctrine of the Church, which is the house of God, is retrieved in the fullness of the divine books [i.e. tablets = books].]

Since this exposition depends on the names of the letters, it is less flexible than Thomas's method, but they are fundamentally similar in that the individual letters initiate words which can then be interpreted. Within the corpus of the most influential Church Fathers, then, there were various strategies for interpreting the individual letters of words, and it seems likely that interpretations like these are what spurred the analysis of ever smaller components of words within etymology.

Even though this indicates an exegetical background to initial letter etymology, I am not convinced that, as some scholars have claimed, the turn towards an exegetical mode amounted to a turning away from epistemic claims. I would

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[66] Jerome, letter 30, ed. by Migne, col. 443.

argue that changes in method need not imply corresponding changes in perceptions of the functions of etymology. Consider the description of *ethimologia* in Peter Helias's *Summa super Priscianum*:

> Ethimologia ergo est expositio alicuius vocabuli per aliud vocabulum, sive unum, sive plura magis nota, secundum rei proprietatem et litterarum similitudinem, ut 'lapis' quasi 'laedens pedem', 'fenestra' quasi 'ferens nos extra'. Hic enim et rei proprietas attenditur et litterarum similitudo observatur. Est vero ethimologia compositum nomen ab *ethimo*, quod interpretatur verum, et *logos*, quod interpretatur sermo, ut dicatur 'ethimologia' quasi 'veriloquium', quoniam qui ethimologizat veram, id est, primam vocabuli originem assignat.[67]

> [Etymology is the description of some word through another more familiar word, either one or several, according to the character of the object and the similarity of the letters, like stone (*lapis*) as if it were 'hurting the foot' (*laedens pedem*), window (*fenestra*) as if it were 'taking us outside' (*ferens nos extra*). Here the character of the object is taken into account and the similarity of the letters is observed. *Ethimologia* is a composite noun derived from *ethimo*, which means true, and *logos*, which means speech, so that we say 'etymology' as if it were 'true speech', because he who etymologizes assigns the true, that is, the first origin to a word.]

This passage has been taken as programmatic for a new way of doing etymology, where 'the description of some word through another more familiar word, either one or several, according to the character of the object and the similarity of the letters' is all that matters.

According to their view, etymology has now become completely exegetical or rhetorical/inventive/strategic; whatever it is, its focus is no longer on epistemology, the word–thing relationship.[68] The second definition of *ethimologia* as *vera, id est prima vocabuli origo* would then be merely traditional and is variously described as either dead or complementary to the new, non-epistemological brand of etymology.

This analysis poses some problems. In practice, there is nothing particularly extravagant about the instances when Helias himself employs etymology.[69] Furthermore, rhetorical or pedagogical use does not rule out epistemic claims.[70]

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[67] Peter Helias, *Summa super Priscianum*, ed. by Reilly, p. 70.

[68] Reynolds, *Medieval Reading*, pp. 81–87; see further note 17.

[69] Peter Helias, *Summa super Priscianum*, ed. by Reilly, p. 1121, s.v. *ethimologia*.

[70] Within rhetoric, etymology or paronomasia can be used either to elicit an argument (a *locus*, belonging to *inventio*) or for mere ornamentation (a *figura*, belonging to *elocutio*) (see den Boeft, 'Some Etymologies in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* X', pp. 244–45). In the former case, verisimilitude will obviously add to the force of the argument.

These are rarely spelled out in the High Middle Ages, but that is true also of the *Etymologiae*, and everyone seems to agree that Isidore employs epistemic etymology. Other uses of etymology are just as implicit as the epistemic claims, and the pedagogical and mnemonic functions ascribed to high medieval etymologizing seem to have been part of the intention behind the *Etymologiae* of Isidore as well.[71] Earlier still, in Varro, these functions are explicitly mentioned.[72]

I do not believe that Helias is here giving two conflicting definitions of *etymologia*. Rather, he first describes the etymological method ('expositio alicuius vocabuli per aliud vocabulum, sive unum, sive plura magis nota') and then the aim of etymology ('qui ethimologizat veram, id est, primam vocabuli originem assignat'). Helias's description is valid for Isidore's work, although this is the first occurrence of the etymology *ferens nos extra*, indicative of the new tendency towards increased syllabic etymologizing (Isidore's etymology is from *fenerare* (supply), because windows supply light).[73] Indeed, Helias's description of the etymological method is probably an expansion and specification of Isidore's own words in his definition of etymology: 'quia nomina et verba rerum nota facit exemplo posito' (since it makes the nouns and verbs for things known by giving an example) (see above). Again, though, and tellingly, the example that Isidore gives is a word-to-word and not a syllabic etymology (*flumen a fluendo*).

This is not to say that there is no basis for claiming that the epistemological underpinnings of etymology changed in the High Middle Ages, at least in certain contexts. With Balbus's claim in the late thirteenth century that 'every word can be etymologized as long as someone is willing to meditate on it' something has clearly happened, but it is less clear exactly what. Ancient and medieval etymology was always more practical than theoretical, and I would argue that of two possible ways of drawing Balbus's statement to its logical con-

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[71] Isidore, *The 'Etymologies'*, trans. by Barney and others, p. 24.

[72] See note 27.

[73] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 15.7.6, ed. by Lindsay. Suzanne Reynolds comments on differences between Helias and Isidore, but it is somewhat questionable to what extent these are borne out by the texts themselves: Reynolds italicizes 'thing' in the translation of Isidore, but not in comparable formulations in Helias (*Medieval Reading*, pp. 82–83). She draws attention to the use of *quasi* 'as if' in Helias's etymologies, stressing how this liberates etymology from truth, without mentioning that this is very common in Isidore as well (a search of the *Etymologiae* in Brepols's *Library of Latin Texts* yields 646 hits, though not all of them in etymological formulas such as *litterae quasi legiterae*, etc.). Helias's definition of etymology as 'the exposition of one word through another word or words which are more familiar' is not found in Isidore but broadly conforms to his practice. (The point about the words being more common does not always hold true in Isidore, but that is the case in the High Middle Ages as well.)

clusion, none is likely to have occurred to him: If all words can be etymologized, that might imply that the pre-Babylonian state of a one-to-one relationship between words and things had been regained. This would be unheard of and cannot be what Balbus means. On the other hand, if etymology is only up to the whim of the interpreter, it may be that the word–thing relationship is simply irrelevant to Balbus. Such an interpretation would again leave Balbus standing alone. By his time, every word can indeed be etymologized, because of the recent developments within etymological method. Yet surely, when etymologizing the word *Deus*, he does not consider truth irrelevant. Etymology's potential for textual exegesis had been increased, but that does not necessarily imply a corresponding decrease in its usefulness for reading the book of the world. Furthermore, and on a more general note, drawing a line between exegesis and epistemology, and thus between religious knowledge and other knowledge, is a difficult proposition in a religious setting, and I am not convinced that such a dichotomy is helpful here. Method had been gradually adapted to function, and even though subtle changes in the perception of etymology are to be expected in accordance with the way etymology was performed in a given context, construing a thorough conceptual shift based on what is little more than a change of methodological emphasis goes far beyond what the sources warrant. If anything, continuity is a much more salient feature than change within premodern etymology. In this context, it is worth repeating that the *Etymologiae* continued to be copied throughout the Middle Ages, and that nearly a dozen printings appeared before 1500.[74]

If a conceptual break within the etymological tradition should be posited, it is rather to be found with Lorenzo Valla and his *Elegantiae linguae latinae* in the fifteenth century than with Helias or Hugutio in the twelfth. Unlike any of his medieval predecessors, Valla in practice rejected *etymologia* in favour of *derivatio*.[75] In so doing, he vented his contempt at Varro, Isidore, Papias, Hugutio, and Balbus alike, showing that to his mind, they were all of a kind.[76]

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[74] Isidore, *The 'Etymologies'*, trans. by Barney and others, p. 24. Manuscripts containing all or parts of the *Etymologiae* listed by century, according to Caton's catalogue, *Las Etimologias en la tradicion manuscrita medieval*: eighth: 1–24a (pp. 32–39), eighth–ninth: 25–179a (pp. 40–85), tenth: 180–293 (pp. 86–114), eleventh: 294–385 (pp. 114–38), twelfth: 386–547 (pp. 139–79), thirteenth: 548–672 (pp. 180–211), fourteenth: 673–813 (pp. 212–42), fifteenth: 814–953 (pp. 242–75), sixteenth: 954–67 (pp. 275–78). Note that for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Caton lists only complete copies, though this is not mentioned in the introduction.

[75] Stevens, 'Lorenzo Valla and Isidore of Seville'. Stevens does not discuss the difference between *etymologia* and *derivatio*, but it is clear from the examples that Valla rejects the former.

[76] See Stevens, 'Lorenzo Valla and Isidore of Seville', p. 345 and n. 2.

Only at this point do we see a critic of the epistemic value of linguistic forms entering into the etymological discourse, and when we do, that person is none other than the father of modern philology and one of the foremost luminaries of southern humanism. His prominence notwithstanding, it would take hundreds of years for such sentiments to win wide currency.

To conclude, a new and more inclusive method for doing etymology emerged in the twelfth century, placing more emphasis on syllabic etymologies and, in line with this development, inventing initial letter etymology. This method complemented the previously dominant word-by-word etymology and was mostly used within lexicography and exegesis.[77] When medieval literature is viewed as a whole, however, it is probably fair to say that the Isidorean method remained dominant throughout the Middle Ages, as will be further corroborated by the various chapters in this book. What this means in practice is that, with regard to both etymology and wordplay, links will predominantly be established between single words, as opposed to the syllabic or initial letter mode. Furthermore, word–thing relationships remained central to etymology and wordplay in general.

Etymology and Wordplay in St Augustine

Latin scholars have in recent decades produced many studies on wordplay and etymology in classical authors.[78] Most noteworthy for the present purposes may be James O'Hara's study on etymological wordplay in Vergil, since it includes relevant commentaries by Servius, which allows us to conclude that medieval scholars would have been aware of many of the etymological allusions which O'Hara analyses in his book.[79] Even though O'Hara focuses on Vergil's use of etymological wordplay and does not investigate the medieval legacy of Vergilian practices, the Servius and Servius Auctus commentaries are likely to have had some impact on medieval perceptions of wordplay as a guide to correct interpretation.

As a background to medieval uses of etymology and paronomasia, however, I shall not focus on the classics, but rather present a brief case study of an author

[77] Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, pp. 69–70.

[78] Thus, for instance, Ahl, *Metaformations*; O'Hara, *True Names*; Michalopoulos, *Ancient Etymologies in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses'*; Cairns, 'The "Etymology" in Ovid's *Heroides* 20.21–32'. The study of ancient etymology has partly been propelled by the publication of Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*.

[79] O'Hara, *True Names*.

of incalculable importance to the Middle Ages, universally admired from the heights of theology to the humbler address of his sermons. Few Latin authors have made such extensive use of paronomasia as St Augustine does in his sermons and, to some extent, in his theological writings.[80] On the other hand, Augustine exhibits a strong scepticism towards the truth value of words in his theoretical and theological writings, stressing repeatedly such points as 'res ipsa nec graeca nec latina est' (the thing itself is neither Greek nor Latin) or, in a more devotional vein, 'intus in domicilio cogitationis nec hebraea nec graeca nec latina nec barbara ueritas sine oris et linguae organis, sine strepitu syllabarum diceret: "uerum dicit"' (Within the abode of my thoughts, Truth, which is neither Hebrew nor Greek nor Latin nor Barbaric, would say, without the organs of mouth or tongue, without the noise of syllables: 'He [Moses] speaks the truth').[81]

Because of Augustine's enormous influence on the Middle Ages, this inner tension in his works merits a closer look.[82] For the following discussion, I am much indebted to Christine Mohrmann, 'Das Wortspiel in den Augustinischen Sermones' and J. Den Boeft, 'Some Etymologies in Augustine's *De civitate Dei* X', though the conclusions arrived at will differ somewhat from theirs.

Augustine's most explicit critique of etymology is found in his *De dialectica*, where he states that contradictory etymologies are indicative of their arbitrariness, and that the explanation of one word through another leads to an endless circle of explanations: 'Huc accedit quod ut somniorum interpretatio ita verborum origo pro cuiusque ingenio iudicatur' (Add to this that the origin of words, like the interpretation of dreams, will be posited according to each person's ingenuity).[83] In *Sololoquia animae*, *De Trinitate*, *De magistro*, *De fide et symbolo*, and *Confessiones* he develops a conventionalist view of language.[84]

With such a massive attestation of Augustine's rebuttal of the word–thing relationship, one might expect his use of wordplay to be little more than a prosodic and perhaps mnemonic feature, and that he would employ paronomasia in his sermons only as a rhetorical tool, without intending any deeper signification. Augustine's practice, though, indicates that his theoretical statements do not tell the whole story and that, on the level of cognition and inspiration, he

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[80] Mohrmann, 'Das Wortspiel in den Augustinischen Sermones', p. 35.

[81] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.20, 11.3, ed. by Henderson, trans. by Watts, II, 130–31, 216–17. See further Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, II.1, 391–95; Stock, *After Augustine*, pp. 3, 21, 29, 33.

[82] This tension has been noted also by Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, pp. 47–48.

[83] Augustine, *De dialectica* 6, ed. by Pinborg, trans. by Jackson, pp. 96–97.

[84] Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, II.1, 393.

did indeed allow for phonetic pointers not only to things, but also to sublime truths. It bears repetition that his depreciative words about etymology in *De dialectica* are followed by his analysis of the sound of the word *vis* (power) as indicative of its meaning, and that he thus plants a naturalist example at the heart of his criticism of such perceptions. In *De doctrina Christiana*, he muses over the symbolic meanings of Hebrew names.[85] Other examples from his rich corpus illustrate just how far he is in practice willing to go down the naturalist road. In his sermon *In natali Quadrati martyris* we read:

> Nonne perfectus martyr Quadratus? Quid quadrato perfectius? Paria sunt latera, undique aequalis est forma; quacumque verterit statio est, non ruina. O nomen pulchrum, demonstrans figuram, et indicans rem futuram![86]

> [Is not Quadratus a perfect martyr? What is more perfect than the square (*quadrato*)? Its sides are of the same length, everywhere its shape is even; wherever it turns it stands steady, it does not collapse. O beautiful name/noun, signifying the figure (*figuram*) and indicating things to come (*futuram*)!]

This passage serves to illustrate that Augustine could use paronomasia both as a carrier of meaning and as embellishment. Quadratus is not only the name of a person, coinciding with the word for a geometrical figure; it also indicates the past and the future perfection of the martyr. Here we see a link from thing (square) to word (*quadratus*) to thing (the martyr) and, furthermore, one that is conducive to allegorical interpretation. The paronomastic relationship between *figuram* and *futuram* (*f-x-uram*), on the other hand, seems to add little but rhetorical colour.

In the sermon *In natali apostolorum Petri et Pauli* Augustine paraphrases Luke 22. 61–62, where Peter has just denied the Lord: 'Respexit eum Dominus, et exiit foras, et flevit amare' (The Lord looked back at him [Peter], and he [Peter] went outside and wept bitterly). Augustine comments: 'Flevit amare, qui noverat amare. Dulcedo secuta est in amore, cuius amaritudo praecesserat in dolore' (He, who had learned to love (*amare*), wept bitterly (*amare*). Sweetness followed in love (*amore*), the bitter pain (*dolore*) of which had come before).[87]

It may be that Augustine, in an instance like this, is mainly aiming at activating the mind of the listener. By first quoting the Bible ('flevit *amare*') and then adding a homonym ('qui noverat *amare*') he encourages meditation on

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[85] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 2. 58, ed. and trans. by Green, p. 82.

[86] Quoted in Mohrmann, 'Das Wortspiel in den Augustinischen Sermones', p. 40.

[87] Augustine, *In natali apostolorum Petri et Pauli*, ed. by Migne, col. 1350; partly quoted in Mohrmann, 'Das Wortspiel in den Augustinischen Sermones', p. 48.

the connection between love and bitterness. This is at least likely to be the case when he draws attention to the same concepts with the rhyme *amore-dolore*. It cannot be ruled out, though, that he also saw some indication of a semantic connection in the phonetic similarity.[88]

Whatever Augustine's intentions may have been, his sermons, where examples like the above abound, were read all through the Middle Ages. When confronted with a passage focusing on phonetic similarities, the intellectual response of medieval readers need not have been dictated by a specialized work like Augustine's *De dialectica* or even his theological works. Rather, they are likely to have viewed such wordplay through the lens of the ubiquitous *Etymologiae* and etymological discourse generally. An evolutionary perspective on the development of semiotic theory, therefore, taking only theoretical works into account and progressing chronologically from author to author, may not do justice to the several Augustines that lived in reception for a thousand years during the Middle Ages. When essential connections between similar words were presupposed to exist, it mattered little what Augustine might have said in a different part of his corpus.[89]

Quite apart from reception, the first example shows that Augustine would indeed employ paronomastic strategies to retrieve meaning. This is true not only of personal names, and not only of sermons. In *De civitate Dei* 10.3 he writes about God:

> Hunc ergo eligentes vel potius religentes (amiseramus enim neglegentes) — hunc ergo religentes, unde et religio dicta perhibitur, ad eum dilectione tendimus.[90]

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[88] Augustine subtly plays on these words in other cases as well. In the opening of Book III of *Confessiones*, he describes his carnal lusts in Carthage, writing such things as *amare amavi* (I loved to love/I loved bitterly). The reader is held in suspense as to whether the ambiguity is unintentional until he writes *amare et amari dulce mihi erat* (to love and be loved was sweet to me), where the introduction of sweetness, the opposite of bitterness, betrays that much is going on beneath the surface and that the seeming sweetnes of carnal love is bitter from the perspective of salvation (Augustine, *Confessions* 3.1, ed. by Henderson, trans. by Watts, I, 98–99).

[89] *De dialectica* survives in thirty-nine manuscripts (Augustine, *De dialectica*, ed. by Pinborg, trans. by Jackson, pp. 8–11). Before the thirteenth century, it is mostly found in manuscripts dealing with the liberal arts or logic. Only in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is it found in several compilations of works of Augustine, indicating that it was then of interest mainly because of its author, and no longer because of the topic, since the works of Aristotle now dominated that field (Augustine, *De dialectica*, ed. by Pinborg, trans. by Jackson, pp. 7–22). Direct references to or quotations from *De dialectica* seem to be rare (Augustine, *De dialectica*, ed. by Pinborg, trans. by Jackson, p. 6).

[90] Quoted in den Boeft, 'Some Etymologies in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* X', pp. 246–47.

> [Choosing (*eligentes*) him, or rather recovering (*religentes*) him (since we had lost
> him through neglect (*neglegentes*)) — recovering (*religentes*) him, then, from where
> 'religion' (*religio*) is considered to draw its name, we direct our course to him in love.]

Here, Augustine is explicit about the *origo* of the word *religio*; it is drawn from
religere (normally *relegere* (to recover)), and this etymology supports his view
of the fall and salvation of man. He implicitly supports his argument with a
rhyming figure (*homoioteleuton*) that is also a *figura etymologica*, giving parallel
examples of words construed from *legere* (collect) (*dilectio* is also a cognate).
Parallel examples, that is, provided that the etymology is accepted.

In *De vera religione* 55.111, on the other hand, another etymology is sug-
gested for the same word: 'ad unum Deum tendentes, et ei uni religantes ani-
mas nostras, unde religio dicta creditur' (when we direct our course to the one
god, and bind (*religantes*) our souls to him, from where religion is believed to
draw its name).[91] Here, the verb is *religare* 'to tie'. In his *Retractationes* 1.13.9,
Augustine again prefers this etymology.

These passages are fine examples of precisely what Augustine is warning us
against in *De dialectica*. Meaning is established through another word, begin-
ning the endless chain of definitions from word to word and, above all, the
proposition of two different etymologies undermines the credibility of each
one. It would seem that Augustine the exegete cannot thrive under the strict
demands of Augustine the dialectician and simply disregards him.

The final and perhaps most telling etymology is found in *De civitate Dei*
10.21, where Augustine discusses how we would much more elegantly refer to
the martyrs as 'our heroes' ('Hos multo elegantius [...] nostros heroas vocare-
mus'). He develops this idea at some length and seems to be quite fond of it.
He remarks all of three times that we cannot refer to the martyrs in this way,
as it is not in accordance with ecclesiastical language, and thus dissuades the
reader from being overly attracted by this turn of phrase. But why is it so irre-
sistible? Augustine explains: The heroes are named after Hera, who according
to 'the stories of the Greeks' had a son by the name of Heros. Hera was mistress
of the air, which was thought to be inhabited by demons and heroes, that is,
the souls of people of particular merit. If, on the other hand, our martyrs were
called heroes, they would not draw their name from living in the air (the ety-
mology ἀήρ > Ἥρα is presupposed), but because they would have conquered
the demons of the air, and among them Iuno (Hera), who has befittingly been
portrayed by the poets as one hostile to virtues and jealous of powerful men

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[91] Augustine, *De vera religione*, ed. by Migne, col. 171.

that strive for heaven. The martyrs do not defeat Hera by the gifts of suppli-
cants, but by divine virtues. Similarly, Scipio Africanus got his surname in a
more befitting way when he conquered Africa by virtue than if he had miti-
gated the temper of his foes by gifts.

It all fits together so well, and this, supposedly, is what makes the epithet so
alluring. This forbidden fruit did not grow of its own accord, though. Augustine
first gives an obviously traditional etymology of *heros* based on Hera's name.[92]
He then proposes another etymological explanation, namely that if the martyrs
were called heroes they would draw their name from the air (ἀήρ). This is the
remarkable part; the second etymology would have been right for the specifi-
cally Christian use of *heros*, had such a use existed.

Augustine here takes liberties that go beyond what he even cares to criticize
in *De dialectica*; he is suggesting a 'true' etymology to a meaning of *heros* that
does not exist. The conclusion seems inevitable that the views expressed in *De
dialectica*, generally taken as central to Augustine's thinking about etymology,
are almost completely irrelevant to his practice, not only in his sermons, but
also in theological works like *De civitate Dei*.

Thus far Augustine, the greatest ancient critic of the truth value of words to
have been extensively studied throughout the Middle Ages. Probably no other
author so clearly illustrates that conventionalist theory and naturalist practice
were not necessarily or even typically at odds with one another. This should
warn us against assuming that scholastic debates or mystical meditations of the
High Middle Ages imply that wordplay was no longer taken seriously. Only
context can serve as a guide to the meaning of medieval wordplay, and we are
on the whole more likely to approximate the medieval reception if we allow
for more epistemic force in medieval wordplay than our modern culture would
predispose us to do.

[92] The matter is somewhat complex; see den Boeft, 'Some Etymologies in Augustine's *De
Civitate Dei* X', pp. 250–52.

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Discretionis libra
(With the Scales of Discernment):
Allegorical Writing and the
Concealment of *etymologia*

Wim Verbaal

By Way of Introduction: Beware! Text to Read!

Reading is not always an easy job. A reader can even get the impression of not being allowed to read at all. If anything differentiates reading cultures before and after the Industrial Revolution, it must be the democratization of reading thanks to the mass production of books and the generalization of a more or less homogeneous system of education. This might have had more impact upon modern reading attitudes than most of us realize. We have become familiar with considering reading as an everyday activity, a way of seriously filling your leisure time, of diversion also from our more 'functional' obligations. Moreover, we are accustomed to read much and fast. Modern academic endeavours are largely based upon exactly these capacities, transposed into the ability to handle huge quantities of reading. Digitalization facilitates the job. It helps us locate the required passages quickly without having to ransack entire libraries, books, articles, indices, paragraphs. We are used to finding whatever reading material we desire, and all too often feel irritated when the text resists, when it does not offer immediately whatever we are looking for.

Can there be a greater contrast to the reading attitude as it is expected from literature that predates this democratization process of the last two centuries,

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let alone the digitalization of our reading habits? All scholars confronted with texts of the past are acquainted with the difficulties encountered when trying to make their reading render whatever one wants to squeeze out. They feel how their reading pace is slowing down, often even coming to a standstill as the text withstands all attempts to fast and securely allow one to take a grip on it. Again and again they realize how repeated reading obliges them to adapt their former interpretations and how unexpectedly shades retreat or deepen. Words and sentences that seemed of no importance suddenly come into relief and become central to the reading.[1]

Certainly, modern texts offer a similar reading experience, but the difference seems to be that historical texts more often appear to be constructed exactly for slowing down the reader's pace. They hardly permit any quick linear reading, let alone the skimming of a book. Word choice is all but simple, and verse and sentence structures oppose themselves, deliberately as it often seems, to a natural order. Elaborated intertextuality creates a complex conglomeration of layered meanings, and the reader is more often than not left with the impression that the text did not deliver even half of the secrets it contains. It defies the reader's efforts as if they were a sacrilege, the attempts of the uninitiated to penetrate the sanctuary.

Not infrequently, the reader is explicitly addressed as such. The text opens by a warning or by a restriction as regards its intended audience. It shows beyond doubt that reading is not considered a democratic but rather an elite occupation, open only to the initiated few that have passed a long and serious preparatory phase. When Bernard of Clairvaux († 1153) opens his series of eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs, he starts by designating the qualities of his supposed listeners: 'Vobis, fratres, alia quam aliis de saeculo, aut certe aliter dicenda sunt' (To you, brothers, other things must be said than to the other people outside and surely in another way).[2] The reason is because he considers them as the perfects to whom he can speak wisdom,[3] 'nisi frustra forte ex longo studiis estis

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[1] This is the place to refer to Marinus Burcht Pranger who keeps on pointing to this rupture between modern and premodern reading: 'As far as I am concerned, for any future studies of the humanities to make sense, the slowing down for reflection and meditation is a prerequisite. If, from a historical perspective, this book takes as its point of departure a period of transition from the slow pace of monastic culture to the outburst of mental energy in towns and universities, it may also be a reminder of the beauty of intellectual rumination once practiced and now almost forgotten'. *The Artificiality of Christianity*, p. xv.

[2] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Canticum* 1.1, in *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. by Leclercq, I, 3. All translations are mine unless otherwise mentioned.

[3] Cf. 1 Cor. 2. 6, according to the King James's Bible.

caelestibus occupati, exercitati sensibus, et in lege Dei meditati die ac nocte' (unless in vain for such a long time you have occupied yourselves with the studies of heaven, exercised your senses and meditated day and night God's law).[4]

Twelfth-century literature is strikingly rich in similar delimitations of the reading public. In the introductory verses to his poetical *Lapidary*, Marbod of Rennes († 1123) pretends that he wants to limit the public of his 'little book' of more than seven hundred verses to a few friends so that the mysteries included may remain secret. That is why he dedicates it to only three friends 'which is much already'. Three is a sacred number, and he is going to reveal sacred things to them. But they will honour God's secrets by their decent confidentiality as their grave demeanour and honest life recommend them.[5]

Marbod's gravity and honesty are rather moral qualities in comparison to the terms Bernard uses, which appeal to the intellect and to schooling: studies, exercise, meditation. The preoccupation of writers with the approachability of their work seems indeed linked to the enormous expansion that higher education took from the first decades of the century onward. Not only did alphabetization reach broader groups within society, but there was also a larger number of young scholars that continued their studies in higher education at the greater centres. As these schools were not yet strictly organized, many teachers pointed out the risk that students might jump to the higher and more lucrative studies too soon without having had the necessary training or ripeness.[6] Some of them tried to prevent this by publishing their writings in a clear order. Peter Abelard's *Logica ingredientibus* (*c.* 1120?) is one of the first manuals that seems to take into consideration this still rather abstract idea of an educational curriculum within one discipline. It seeks to set out the first steps that make it possible for its readers to approach the more difficult and complicated problems of the prolonged studies in logic.

Abelard, like Marbod, belongs to the very beginning of the educational movement that characterizes the twelfth century. In their approaches, they

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[4] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Canticum* 1.1, in *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. by Leclercq, I, 3.

[5] Marbod of Rennes, *Liber lapidum* Prologus 5–13: 'Hoc opus excerpens, dignum componere duxi | Aptum gestanti forma breviore libellum, | Qui michi precipue paucisque pateret amicis, | Nam maiestatem minuit, qui mistica vulgat, | Nec secreta manent, quorum fit conscia turba. | Hunc tribus, ut multum, dandum sancimus amicis, | Qui numerus sacer est, et nos sacra pandimus illis, | Qui secreta Dei servando decenter honorent, | Quos gravitas morum vite commendet honestas.' Marbod of Rennes, *Lapidario / Liber Lapidum*, ed. by Herrera, pp. 6–7.

[6] Warnings of this kind can be found in many authors. Illustrative may be the treatment by John of Salisbury of his adversary Cornificius and his like in the *Metalogicon* I.3.

betray the optimistic belief in human reasonableness. Later in the century, teachers became aware that out of overestimation or opportunism students did not acquiesce in following the long and slow study programme as it was ideally outlined. As John of Salisbury († 1180) remarks: 'fere non morabatur in scolis ulterius quam eo curriculo temporis quo auium pulli plumescunt' (They stayed as long under the guidance of their masters as young birds need to get their plumes).[7] Thus we see more and more teachers warn the readers not to take their book in hand when they are not well prepared.

Reading Alan of Lille or How to Bar your Readers from Reading

Perhaps no other master at the schools makes more use of similar admonitions than Alan of Lille († 1203). Time and again he cautions his readers not to continue their lecture if they are not ready for it, and repeatedly he gives a broad description of the qualities one has to possess in case one wants to proceed in the reading. In the Prologue to his *Regulae caelestis iuris* or 'Theological Rules', he frankly states:

> Unde non sunt rudibus proponende et introducendis qui solis sensuum dediti sunt speculis sed illis, qui ductu purioris mentis ad ineffabilia conscendunt et puriori oculo philosophie secreta perspiciunt. Hee enim propositiones in peritiori sinu theologie absconduntur et solis sapientibus collocuntur.[8]

> [These [rules] cannot be proposed to the unschooled neither to those that recently started as they devote themselves only to the mirrors of the senses. They are dedicated to those who under the guidance of a purer mind ascend to the unspeakable things and who can look with purer eyes to the secrets of philosophy. These propositions hide themselves in the most learned womb of theology and speak only to the wise.]

Elsewhere he warns, perhaps even in harsher words:

> Nos ergo qui theologie profitemur militiam, ex sanctorum patrum auctoritatibus firmamenta sumentes, cum sancto Moyse circa montes sacre scripture terminos statuamus ultra quos nemini qui civis theologicus est concedatur progressus.[9]

> [Therefore, we who profess ourselves to belong to the army of Theology, we take our grounds from the authorities of the saintly Fathers. Let us lay with saintly Moses

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[7] John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* I.3, ed. by Hall and Keats-Rohan.

[8] Alan of Lille, '*Regulae caelestis iuris*', Prologue 8, ed. by Häring, p. 123.

[9] Alan of Lille, 'La Somme *Quoniam Homines*', Prologue, ed. by Glorieux, p. 120.

the borders around the mountains of Sacred Scripture, beyond which nobody who is a theological citizen is allowed to proceed.]

And a bit further down we read:

Indignis vero nostri tractatus claudatur intelligentia; attestante enim Aristotele: minuit secretorum maiestatem qui indignis secreta divulgat; nec fas est, ut Dionisii [scil. Areopagitae] testantur eloquia, in porcos projicere invisibilium margaritarum inconfusum et luciforme beneficumque ornatum.[10]

[May the intelligence of our treatise remain closed to the unworthy. For Aristotle claims: he who profanes secrets to the unworthy, will diminish their majesty. Neither is it allowed, as Dionysius eloquently testifies, to throw indistinctly the light-forming and well-doing decoration of invisible pearls to the pigs.]

Alan's most detailed and elaborated caveat, however, can be found in the work that earned him greatest fame, the epic *Anticlaudianus*. In the prose prologue to the entire work, he lavishly singles out his intended readers and the background they need to possess in order to understand his poem. After excluding all students of both 'the lower arts' (those of the trivium) and 'the higher arts' (those of the quadrivium), barring the doors even to the students of natural philosophy 'who are beating the doors of heaven',[11] he concludes:

Ab huius igitur operis arceantur ingressu qui, solam sensualitatis insequentes imaginem, rationis non appetunt ueritatem, ne sanctum canibus prostitutum sordescat, ne porcorum pedibus conculcata margarita depereat, ne derogetur secretis, si eorum magestas diuulgetur indignis.

[Let those be denied access to this work who pursue only sense-images and do not reach out for the truth that comes from reason, lest what is holy, being set before dogs be soiled, lest the pearl, trampled under the feet of swine be lost, lest the esoteric be impaired if its grandeur is revealed to the unworthy.][12]

Who, then, is granted the permission to read?

[10] Alan of Lille, 'La Somme *Quoniam Homines*', Prologue, ed. by Glorieux, p. 120.

[11] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, Prologue in prose: 'qui celum philosophie vertice pulsant'. Latin text is taken from Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, ed. by Bossuat, p. 56; the English translation is from Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, trans. by Sheridan, p. 40. Sheridan identifies the *philosophie vertex* of this phrase with the struggle of 'natural philosophy to reach out beyond the human and make contact with the science of the divine': p. 41, n. 10.

[12] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, Prologue in prose (ed. by Bossuat, p. 56; trans. by Sheridan, pp. 40–41).

Sed hii qui sue rationis materiale in turpibus imaginibus non permittunt quiescere, sed ad intuitum supercelestium formarum audent attollere, mei operis ingrediantur angustias, certa discretionis libra pensantes quid sit dignum in aures publicas promulgari uel silentio penitus sepeliri.

[Let those, however, who do not allow their reflexions to dwell on disgraceful imaginings but have the courage to raise them to a view of forms above the heavens, enter the strait paths of my work, weighing with the reliable scales of discernment what deserves to be spread far and wide for public hearing, what deserves to be buried deep in silence.][13]

What are the prerequisites of this ideal reader according to Alan? The enumeration of the qualities his poem possesses must give an idea and therefore has to be quoted in full:

Quoniam igitur in hoc opere resultat grammatice syntaseos regula, dialetice lexeos maxima, oratorie reseos communis sententia, arismetice matheseos paradoxa, musice melos anxioma, geometrie gramatis theorema, astronomice ebdomadis excellentia, theophanie celestis emblema, infruniti homines in hoc opus sensus proprios non impingant, qui ultra metas sensuum rationis non excedant curriculum, qui iuxta imaginationis sompnia aut recordantur uisa, aut figmentorum artifices commentantur incognita.

[There resounds in this work the rule of grammatical *syntaxis*, the maxim of dialectical *lexis*, the common sentence of rhetorical *resis*, the paradox of mathematical lore, the axiom of the melody of music, the theorem of the line of geometry, the excellence of the astronomical septenary, the symbol of celestial theophany. For that reason, let not men without taste thrust their own sense on this work, men who cannot extend the course of their reasoning beyond the limits of the senses, who, in the wake of dreams of their imagination, either remember what they saw or, as contrivers of figments, comment on what they do not know.][14]

This enumeration of qualities that Alan ascribes to his own poem causes at the very least a bit of embarrassment to the modern reader. For one thing, because it includes those same lower and higher arts whose disciples had just been excluded from the reading. The conclusion must be that the poem implies the command of all the knowledge and skills acquired in the two educational levels but addresses more specifically those readers who want to reach beyond and who do not remain enclosed within their own discipline.

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[13] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, Prologue in prose (ed. by Bossuat, p. 56; trans. by Sheridan, pp. 40–41).

[14] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, Prologue in prose (ed. by Bossuat, p. 56; trans. by Sheridan, pp. 40–41). With adaptations notably in the punctuation: see below, note 21.

Nevertheless, it is also remarkable that natural philosophy is not included this time. It is replaced by 'celestial theophany', to which natural philosophy does not have access, according to Alan in his short commentary on the celestial hierarchy, *Hierarchia Alani*.[15] For 'Theophania est scientia angelica qua Deum intuetur angelus' (theophany is the knowledge of angels thanks to which they can look upon God).[16] To acquire this *scientia angelica*, theophany needs another approach than natural philosophy.

> Manifesta est ergo differentia inter philosophiam et theophaniam [...] naturalis philosophia ab intellectu incipit, et ad rei experientiam ex sensu descendit. [...] Theophania vero a sensu incipit et ad intellectum tendit. Cum enim videmus, ut supra dictum est, rerum pulchritudinem, magnitudinem, ordinem, Deum intelligimus non plenarie sed semiplene: quod tamen imperfectum est modo in intelligendo perficietur in future. Intelligentia vero de Deo iam consummate est in angelo.[17]

> [There is a clear difference between philosophy and theophany. [...] Natural philosophy starts from the intellect and descends toward the experience of reality through understanding. [...] Theophany, however, starts from understanding and reaches towards the intellect. When we see, as aforesaid, in reality the beauty, the magnitude, the order, we have of God not a full but a half-full intelligence. What is imperfect now in our intelligence, however, will be perfected in the future. Intelligence of God is brought to completion in the angel.]

Indeed, the poem will not deal with this approach of reality that starts by understanding the *substantifici genii*, those forces of nature that give substance to the divine ideas. That had been the subject of Alan's prosimetrum *De planctu Naturae*, written before the *Anticlaudianus*.[18] There, Nature and Genius,

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[15] Alan of Lille, *Hierarchia Alani*: 'Hec autem manifestatio [scil. per substantificos genios, id est per substantiales naturas] pertinet ad naturalem philosophiam que de rerum nature pertractat. Scientia autem non habetur de Deo per substantiales naturas, quia cause causalissime nulla est causa, sed per signa consequentia, id est, per effectus supreme cause, qui ex suprema causa consequuntur, de Deo notitia habetur. Hanc manifestationem habet theophania.' Alan of Lille, *Textes inédits*, ed. by d'Alverny, p. 228.

[16] Alan of Lille, *Textes inédits*, ed. by d'Alverny, p. 227.

[17] Alan of Lille, *Textes inédits*, ed. by d'Alverny, p. 228.

[18] Dating Alan's works remains a much-disputed question. Only a few works can be dated with certainty, among which the *Anticlaudianus* that must be situated in the first half of the 1180s. As to all the other works, their origins remain largely based upon stylistic or comparative criteria and thus subject to uncertainty and discussion. See for sometimes differing attempts Raynaud de Lage, *Alain de Lille*, pp. 19–34; Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, ed. by Bossuat, pp. 12–13; Alan of Lille, *Textes inédits*, ed. by d'Alverny, pp. 32–183; Alan of

that is 'nature itself or the God of nature',[19] play the principal parts. The *Anticlaudianus*, on the contrary, finds its focus and centre in the vision of God as it is permitted to the main character, Prudentia, by way of the mirror Faith offers her to look in (Book VI). Enumerating the qualities of his epic, Alan thus seems to delineate it sharply from his earlier work that, founded upon the same grounds, that is, the disciplines denominated as respectively lower and higher arts, strove after different objectives by focusing on earthly reality instead of its divine origins, the *causa causalissima*. In the *De planctu*, the underlying frame was offered by natural philosophy. Now, in the *Anticlaudianus*, the reader will be introduced into theophany.

Nonetheless, what will alienate the modern readers in Alan's enumerative list perhaps more than this tension with what he just had been reading of the arts, must be the choice and use of words. Reading over the different attributes one remains puzzled by the meaning they might have. They partly seem to consist out of pure repetition. For what might be the difference between *grammatica* and *syntaxis* or between *arithmetica* and *mathesis*? And what do all these apparently bizarre designations of Greek origin mean? Is there a logic behind their succession: *paradoxa*, *axioma*, *theorema*, *emblema*? And do they stand on the same level as the Latin terms: *regula*, *maxima*, *sententia*, *excellentia*?

Actually, one of the most insurmountable barriers to start reading an author like Alan is his rich or rather overdone vocabulary that results in giving an impression of highly complicated sentences. That this is exactly Alan's intention becomes clear from the rhetorical and poetical choices, which reoccur again and again in these texts and which offer an exquisite opportunity for the author to display his lexicographical virtuosity: long lists and enumerations, detailed descriptions, elaborated metaphors. The modern reader, accustomed to a certain speed in the narrative strand and surely not used to consider reading a static experience, soon loses interest and renounces. Alan of Lille never became popular in modern times.

Yet, he once was, especially during the late Middle Ages. To the intelligentsia from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, the *Anticlaudianus* offered a fascinating reading. It not only received its proper commentaries like the classical

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Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, trans. by Sheridan, pp. 8–9; Ochsenbein, *Studien zum Anticlaudianus des Alanus ab Insulis*, pp. 14–16; Evans, *Alan of Lille*, pp. 14–19; Alan of Lille, *Viaggio della saggezza*, ed. by Chiurco, pp. 75–78 (but this work must be handled with care as the author assumes Alan of Lille to be identical with Alan of Tewkesbury).

[19] 'Genius enim natura vel Deus nature dicitur' (Alan of Lille, *Textes inédits*, ed. by d'Alverny, p. 228).

texts, but it was partly or entirely translated, transposed into other forms, or incorporated in new compositions.[20] Apparently, it is exactly what frightens modern readers that made the poem so attractive to Alan's contemporaries and to the succeeding centuries. To understand this, we will have to adapt ourselves to a form of static reading again. Let us try by returning to Alan's enumeration of the qualities of his poem.

Not Giving In or How to Read Alan of Lille

The inventory consists of eight items.[21] With one exception, they all contain three elements and are ordered according to trivium and quadrivium: grammar, dialectics, rhetoric; mathematics, music, geometry, astronomy. Theophany forms the climax and conclusion. Many ancient and medieval texts offer a similar catalogue. The last item, theophany, in that case, could be simply identified with theology. But according to Alan, theophany is not the same as theology. Whereas we saw that theophany is the *scientia angelica* that allows the angel to look upon God, 'theologia est humana scientia qua deus ab homine intelligitur' (theology is the knowledge of man thanks to which God can be understood by man).[22] Alan does not give a simple catalogue of the arts and disciplines of the schools and urges our reading to pay even more attention to his exact wording.

The catalogue starts, as mentioned, with the arts of the trivium, constructing each description in a parallel way: the common Latin name as an adjective, a Greek term in the genitive, a Latin technical linguistic term as the dominant element. Superficial reading might suggest that Alan partly juxtaposes almost synonymous concepts side by side.[23] The words, however, are very carefully cho-

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[20] The longest commentary was written by a disciple of Alan, Ralph of Longchamp. The most sublime rewriting of Alan's work is Dante's *Paradiso*.

[21] For the reading of the catalogue I follow the analysis of Bourgain, *Le Latin médiéval*, p. 519. She has shown the regularity of Alan's construction, based on sonority, which has escaped hitherto the editors and translators. The editions and translations thus give nine constituents by an erroneous punctuation that separates *anxioma* from *musica melos* and *geometrie* from *gramatis theorema*. The problem has arisen because of the non-recognition of the word *melos* that has not to be identified with the word *melos*, gen: *melodis* or *melos*, gen: *meli* but with *melos*: *indeclinabile est neutri generis*, as given by the medieval dictionaries, the *Vocabularius familiaris et compendiosus* by Guillaume Le Tailleur (1490) and the *Dictionarius* by Firminus Verris (1440) (consulted at the Database of Latin Dictionaries, Brepols). By a simple but ingenious change in punctuation, Pascale Bourgain has restored the text to its meaningful beauty.

[22] Alan of Lille, *Textes inédits*, ed. by d'Alverny, p. 227.

[23] This is also what Sheridan in the note to his translation seems to suggest, even when he

sen, the Greek terms stemming from the school of Gilbert de la Porrée and his commentaries on Boethius. Another member of this same school, Everard of Ypres, a contemporary of Alan, offers us a definition for them according to Gilbert's teaching. In a witty dialogue between himself and his own reason, *Dialogus Ratii et Everardi* (*c*. 1195), he explains:

> Sed alia est perfectio locutionis secundum syntaxim alia secundum lexim alia secundum resim. Haec enim perfecta est secundum syntaxim id est secundum grammaticam perfectionem: alba chimaera sedet sed imperfecta quia falsum implicans et affirmans secundum lexim id est secundum perfectionem logicam quae attenditur secundum ueritatem et falsitatem intellectus quam non attendit perfectio grammatica quae consistit in congrua dictionum ordinatione. Sed haec: alba sedet chimaera perfecta est perfectione reseos cuius potius est ornatum locutionis attendere quam ueritatem et falsitatem.[24]

> [A statement is not in the same sense perfect as regards *syntaxis* or *lexis* or *resis*. Take the phrase: 'A white chimaera is sitting'. This is perfect as regards *syntaxis*, i.e. grammatical perfection. But because it implies and confirms something untrue, it is imperfect as regards *lexis*, i.e. logical perfection because this pursues understanding about truth and falsehood. Which is not the case of grammatical perfection that concerns the suitable arrangement of the saying. This same phrase 'A white chimaera is sitting' is perfect as regards the perfection of *resis* because this strives more after the beauty of the expression than after truth and falsehood.]

By his choice for exactly these words, Alan wants to differentiate between perfection according to syntactical construction (grammar: *syntaxis*), philosophical truth (dialectic: *lexis*), and rhetorical beauty (rhetoric: *resis*).

The technical term that closes and dominates each of the three constituents seems to be closely linked to the respective arts. Each reoccurs later in the poem when the three disciplines make their appearance. Then the *regula* is said to reign in the field of grammar, the *maxima* (to be understood as the *maxima propositio*) arms the dialectical refutation (*elenchus*), while the rhetorical *sententia* either disagrees and conflicts with the letter of the law or in its ambiguity gives rise to doubt in the letter of the law.[25] The qualification of the poem in the

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tries to introduce variation in the text itself: Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, trans. by Sheridan, p. 41, n. 15.

[24] Everardus of Ypres, *Dialogus Ratii et Everardi*, ed. in Häring, 'A Latin Dialogue', pp. 270–71.

[25] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus* II.419: 'Illic imperium datur arti, regula regnat'; III.46: 'Cur argumentum firmet locus, armet elenchum | Maxima, que uires proprios largitur elencho'; III.207–08: 'Vel contra scriptum discors sentencia pugnat, | Vel parit in scripto dubium senten-

prologue as elaborated in the enumeration of the arts of the trivium thus has to be read in the following way: with respect to grammar, perfect construction of the phrasing as dictated by its rule; with respect to dialectic, perfect truth as dictated by its most important proposition; with respect to rhetoric, perfect beauty as dictated by its common interpretation.[26]

In his elaboration of the arts of the quadrivium, Alan takes a somewhat different turn. Although the constituents are constructed in a similar way, opening with the common Latin denomination, followed by a Greek term in the genitive, and closed by the dominating technical term, the internal links between the elements are much less clear. On one side, Alan plays with the central Greek terms, using first an umbrella term *mathesis* that, according to twelfth-century sources, mostly includes all four arts of the quadrivium,[27] and then three auxiliary terms (*melos* or melody, *gramma* or line, *hebdomada* or septenary).[28] On the other hand, Alan seems to enjoy the variation in technical terms to indicate each art's principle: *paradoxa* for mathematics, *a(n)xioma* for music,[29] *theorema* for geometry, and *excellentia* for astronomy. Of these, *theorema* is the only one that, in contemporary literature, seems explicitly linked to its art, geometry.[30]

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cia duplex' (ed. by Bossuat, pp. 85, 90, 95). See Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, trans. by Sheridan, p. 100, for the paraphrase of the last verses. Both *sententia* and *maxima* appear twice in these passages (*maxima* also in III.43), while the fragment on grammar includes the same verb *resultare* that opens the enumeration (II.415).

[26] This seems to be the sense that Alan gives here to *sententia*. It conforms to his use of the word in the later presentation of rhetoric in explaining or challenging the wording of the law.

[27] For example, John of Salisbury in his *Policraticus* II.18, l. 149: 'In his uero quattuor speciebus mathesis, id est doctrinalis, tota consistit, et quasi quattuor philosophiae limitibus mundanae sapientiae perfectionem assequitur. Primus itaque gradus est ab arithmetica numerorum uirtutem mutuare. Secundus proportionum gratiam a musica trahere. Tertius obtinere scientiam a geometria mensurarum. Quartus idem que nouissimus ueram positionem siderum assequitur et uim caelestium perscrutatur'. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus I–IV*, ed. by Keats-Rohan.

[28] I interpret Alan's use of *ebdomada* here according to the reading of Bourgain, *Le Latin médiéval*, p. 519, which differs from the readings in Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, trans. by Sheridan, p. 41, and Alan of Lille, *Viaggio della saggezza*, ed. by Chiurco, to which I will return hereafter.

[29] According to the edition, this is the reading of the manuscripts. Perhaps a link could be made to William of Conches who in his *Glosae super Boethium*, *In Consolationem* IV, *in prosam* 2 writes: 'anxioma est praemissa ratio communis ualens ad aliquid probandum propter eiusdem probationem' (William of Conches, *Glossae super Boethium*, ed. by Nauta, p. 222).

[30] See Hugh of Saint Victor, *Practica geometriae* 1: 'Et hoc quidem theorema formatur cum altitudo in extremis labris orizontis prominet' (*Opera propaedeutica*, ed. by Baron, p. 28). This is confirmed by the *Vocabularius familiaris et compendiosus* by Guillaume Le Tailleur (1490):

Of course, the last one, *excellentia*, arrests the attention as it is not a Greek derivate. Neither does it appear to be used elsewhere in a technical sense that would make its use parallel to the other three terms comprehensible. In order to understand Alan's choice of this word, we have to return to his *Regulae caelestis iuris*. In the prologue, Alan qualifies the characteristics of the theological rules that he will explain. Although they are generally denominated *maxima*, he has some five particular names for them because of their distinctive features. Three of these return in our enumeration. Alan says that philosophers call the theological rules *paradoxa* while rightly glorious because of their obscurity, *enigmata* because of the inner splendour of their comprehension, *emblemata* because they can be understood by the purer keenness of the mind, *entimemata* because they are hidden in the interior of the mind, *ebdomades* or dignities because of their authority.[31]

In the catalogue of his prologue to the *Anticlaudianus*, Alan likewise opens the quadrivium with the *paradoxa*, now linked to mathematics, thus apparently causing this art to be elevated to the theological sciences thanks to the glorious obscurity of its principles. He closes the quadrivium with the *ebdomades*, but taken in their true significance of septenary as part of the science of astronomy. Yet, he also has his qualification of the term in the *Regulae* in mind.[32] The word *excellentia* that closes this constituent of the enumeration first of all has the intention to transmit the other sense, for it can without problem be taken as a synonym of *dignitates*.

This might suffice for a close reading of not even four prose lines in the prologue to a poem that counts 4354 verses, and in which the poet apparently wants his readers to be attentive as we have been in this short passage. If as a reader, you are not willing to follow his advice, you may reckon yourself among the *infruniti homines*, the tasteless men who are warned not to thrust their own sense upon the work.[33] Can we imagine a reading that differs more from mod-

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'Theoremata dicuntur regule geometrice'. For Alan's use and interpretation of each of these terms, see his *Regulae caelestis iuris*, Prologue 1–6 and infra.

[31] Alan of Lille, *Regulae caelestis iuris*, Prologue 6: 'propter sui auctoritatem *ebdomades i.e.* dignitates dicuntur. Ebda enim Grece, Latine dignitas dicitur' (Alan of Lille, '*Regulae caelestis iuris*', ed. by Häring, p. 122). As to the origin of the terms, Alan found them in Gilbert of Poitiers's Prologue to his commentary on Boethius, *De bonorum ebdomade* (*The Commentaries on Boethius*, ed. by Häring, pp. 185–86).

[32] As mentioned, the dating of Alan's works remains a point of discussion. But Alan of Lille, *Textes inédits*, ed. by d'Alverny, p. 67, situates the *Regulae* shortly before the *Anticlaudianus*. The link between both works in the use of the word, however, seems undeniable.

[33] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, Prologue in prose (see note 14).

ern reading customs? Each word has to be tasted, to be weighed for the echoes it contains, for the underlying senses it may call forth, for the resonance it exercises upon the words that surround it. And then we have not even considered musicality yet. The catalogue is nicely constructed according to rhyming effects: all constituents open with a word ending on *e*, close with a word ending on *a*, while the central words change from the genitive ending *os* to *is*.[34]

Setting Off with Alan or How Reading Becomes a Way

Being an attentive reader thus implies an attention for all the levels that are involved in writing. This is exactly what Alan prescribes:

> In hoc etenim opere litteralis sensus suavitas puerilem demulcebit auditum, moralis instructio perficientem imbuet sensum, acutior allegorie subtilitas proficientem acuet intellectum.

> [For in this work the sweetness of literal sense will soothe the hearing of boys, moral instruction will imbue the sense on its road to perfection, the sharper subtlety of allegory will whet the advancing intellect.][35]

Threefold reading of scripture is suggested in these words, that is, a reading according to respectively a literal, moral, and spiritual (or mystical) sense.[36] Although it is not unusual to find this way of reading applied to non-biblical

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[34] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, Prologue in prose: *grammatice/dialetice/oratorie/arismetice/musice/ geometrie/astronomice/theophanie*; *regula/maxima/sententia/paradoxa/anxioma/ theorema/ excellentia/emblema*; *syntaseos/lexeos/reseos/matheseos/melos//gramatis/ebdomadis/ celestis*. Bourgain, *Le Latin medieval*, p. 519.

[35] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, Prologue in prose (ed. by Bossuat, p. 56; trans. by Sheridan, pp. 40–41, with adaptations). Bourgain, *Le Latin medieval*, p. 519, points to the expected inversion of the verbs. One would first expect *proficientem* (advancing) and then *perficientem* (perfecting). The manuscripts show some hesitation, but the majority gives the reading as followed by the editor. This seems to conform to Alan's interpretation of the concepts they belong to: *sensus* concerns the material or corporeal realities, *intellectus* the immaterial or incorporeal realities. Alan thus seems to imply that human understanding of the corporeal truth can attain a perfection that his understanding of the incorporeal truth will never be capable of. For that reason, he stipulates that the *sensus* can be found on its way to perfection, whereas the *intellectus* can only be in a way of advancing. Cf. Alan of Lille, 'La Somme *Quoniam Homines*', ed. by Glorieux, p. 123: 'Sensu enim et intellectu quasi quibusdam mensuris comprehendimus existentia; sensu quidem hec corporalia que ex partibus sunt compaginata; in corpore enim sensus ostenditur per quem ipsum comprehenditur; intellectu vero incorporalia que concretionem naturarum compositione retinent'.

[36] De Lubac, *Exegèse médiévale*.

writings as well, it is less evident that the invitation to read a text according to the different interpretational levels comes from the author himself.[37] Alan seems to suggest that his poem must be considered as a sort of sacred or at least authoritative writing that encloses more levels of meaning than the most obvious one.

Once again, careful reading is necessary to gather the meaning Alan wants to transmit. Actually, he is not speaking about three different and separated levels but rather about one continuing reading movement that goes from hearing (*auditum*) by way of understanding (*sensus*) to intellect (*intellectus*). Actually, this is exactly what Alan believes to be the task of theophany, which 'starts from understanding and reaches towards the intellect'.[38] The poem itself, so he seems to imply, *is* the way of theophany. This means, however, that those who are capable of reading the poem as the writer had intended it to be read will achieve 'scientia angelica qua Deum intuetur angelus' (the knowledge of angels thanks to which they can look upon God).[39]

This movement, Alan suggests, is induced by the sweetness of the poem (*suavitas*), leading to the instruction it contains (*instructio*) in order to end in the subtlety (*subtilitas*) that can only be grasped by the intellect. These three aspects each returned in our reading of Alan's enumeration of the qualities of his own poem: the sweetness of the words helped to sound the construction of the catalogue in such a way that we could grasp the way it teaches us how to understand the different problems that the world around us provokes. Each fragment of the text contains the entirety.

Reading Etymology or How to Understand Alan's Poetics

The foundations of Alan's appeal to a multilayered reading attitude are his delicate choice of words and his wording of the phrase. There is a good reason why he starts by the sweetness of literal sense (*litteralis sensus suavitas*) that delights the childish ear (*puerilem auditum*). This is the first step in the reading process, which is set both on the sensory level, since it catches the music of the

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[37] For an application of the threefold reading on a profane text, we can refer to Bernard Silvestris's commentary on the first six books of the Aeneid, to which we will return. As to an auto-exegesis, one might think of the letter to Can Grande della Scala, ascribed to Dante, in which the author (if authentic) gives an explanation of the *Commedia* according to the three senses.

[38] Alan of Lille, *Hierarchia Alani*: see note 17.

[39] Alan of Lille, *Hierarchia Alani*, in *Textes inédits*, ed. by d'Alverny, p. 227.

sound, as on the intellectual level, because reading the poem demands all the requirements of primary education (i.e. the arts of the language as taught by the trivium). As we could deduce from the catalogue of qualities Alan asks from his reader, sound brought order in the enumeration, while insight in word choice and wordplay opened up the road to deeper and fuller understanding. Interpretation, however, started with wonder about the succession of Latin and Greek terms that seemingly were synonyms as if Alan wanted to explain the more infrequent term by its more common Latin equivalent. This first surprise led to the more profound sounding of the actual meanings of the words, by an appeal to Alan's other works. At every step, the reading process became denser and encountered new perspectives from which to approach Alan's wording.

The entire reading and interpretation process started, however, in what one might recognize as a form of *etymologia per expositionem* as defined by Peter Helias († *c*. 1165):

> Ethimologia ergo est expositio alicuius vocabuli per aliud vocabulum, sive unum, sive plura magis nota, secundum rei proprietatem et litterarum similitudinem.[40]

> [Etymology thus is the explanation of a word by one or more other words that are more known and that conform to the concrete signification and to literal similarity.]

This definition corroborated a turn in the linguistic approach of etymology,[41] which was no longer exclusively considered as a disclosure of the hidden meaning of words by pointing to their origins.[42] It opened the door to a way of explaining words by both sonorous and intellectual associations, as the examples Peter Helias gives: 'ut lapis quasi ledens pedem' (stone as if making the foot stumble) or 'fenestra quasi ferens nos extra' (window as if drawing us outward).[43]

Alan seems well aware of this new etymological approach, even when he uses the technical term itself only once. When discussing in his *Summa 'Quoniam homines'* the unity in the Trinity, he writes on the meaning of the word *persona*:

[40] Peter Helias, *Summa super Priscianum*; quoted by Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, p. 13, n. 17. See also Biondi, 'Lat. *Ethimologista*', p. 168.

[41] Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, pp. 15–22. Nuanced by Biondi, 'Lat. *Ethimologista*', p. 168. But see Mikael Males, 'Etymology, Wordplay, and the Truth Value of the Linguistic Sign from Antiquity to the Middle Ages', in this volume.

[42] As also retaken by Peter Helias immediately afterwards: 'ut dicatur ethimologia quasi veriloquium, quoniam qui ethimologizat veram, id est primam, vocabuli origine assignat'; quoted in Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, p. 15.

[43] Peter Helias, *Summa super Priscianum*; quoted in Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, p. 13, n. 17.

Excogitaverunt ergo hoc nomen persona quod principaliter significat usiam, con-
significat autem personarum distinctionem. Ratione enim ethimologie vel com-
positionis, persona dicitur quod per se una. Ex hoc ergo quod ibi intelligitur hoc
nomen una vel unum, significatur divina usia; unus enim vel unum in sacra pagina
significat usiam. Ex eo quod ibi intelligitur 'per se', insinuatur distinctio, ut sit sen-
sus: Pater est persona, id est per se unum quasi distinctus et unum. Et ita in hoc
nomine persona insinuatur divina usia et personalis distinctio.[44]

[They [the Fathers] thought of this word *persona*, because its first meaning is *usia*,
but besides it also means personal distinction. For, by reason of etymology or com-
position, *persona* is said because *per se one* (*per se una*). Now, from the fact that this
word is understood as 'one' (*una vel unum*), it means the divine *usia*. For, 'one' in
the Holy Scripture means *usia*. But, as far as it is understood as 'per se', it points to
the distinction. The meaning thus is: The Father is a *persona*, which means 'per se
one' as if distinct and one. For that reason, in the word *persona* both the divine *usia*
and the personal distinction are pointed at.]

Alan is clearly acquainted with the etymological approach as we find it explained
by Peter Helias. But to him, apparently, this way of using etymology deals only
with the construction of the word (*compositio*). As such he applies it regularly
in his theological dictionary, the *Distinctiones dictionum theologicalium*, giving
similar equations as Peter Helias does: 'Abyssus dicitur proprie aquarum pro-
funditas, unde in Exodo: Abyssi operuerunt eos (15:5); profunditas aquarum
dicitur abyssus quasi sine bysso, id est sine candore' (Abyss is properly said of
deep waters [...]. Deep waters are called an abyss as if *sine bysso* (without bys-
sus), which means without lustre).[45] Or: 'Aquilo proprie dicitur ventus frigidis-
simus quo aquae congelantur, unde dicitur Aquilo quasi aquas ligans' (Aquilo
[the north wind] is properly said of an ice-cold wind that makes the waters
freeze. That is why it is called Aquilo as if *aquas ligans* (binding the waters)).[46]
In all these cases the word is dissected into its significant parts, based upon a
sort of literal similarity (*litterarum similitudo*).[47]

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[44] Alan of Lille, *Summa Quoniam homines* 1.2.1.36; 'La Somme *Quoniam Homines*', ed. by
Glorieux, p. 180.

[45] Alan of Lille, *Distinctiones dictionum theologicalium*, ed. by Migne, col. 689.

[46] Alan of Lille, *Distinctiones dictionum theologicalium*, ed. by Migne, col. 706.

[47] But note that to Alan the similarity of the letters is not the decisive factor but rather an
aid to discover the constituent parts. This never leads him to the more elaborate deductions as
can be found in some of his contemporaries. See the examples from Thomas the Cistercian in
Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, p. 69.

Alan also has knowledge of the distinction between this expositional etymology and the derivational one. He clearly seems to prefer the *etymologia per expositionem* above the other. Still in the *Distinctiones*, he explains the sense of a word only twice while referring to its origins. On the meaning of the snake named *basiliscus*, he mentions:

> Et derivatur basiliscus a Graeco basileos, quod interpretatur rex in Latino, id est quasi rex serpentum dicitur, quia omnes superat veneno.[48]

> [*Basiliscus* derives from the Greek *basileos*, which is translated into Latin as 'king', thus as if it is said to be 'the king of the serpents', because it surpasses them all with its poison.]

As to the sense of pruning, he says:

> Putatio dicitur opinio, quod derivatur a puto, tas, quod est opinari. Dicitur abscisio superfluorum a vineis vel arboribus, et secundum hoc derivatur a puto, tas quod est purgo, as. Dicitur peccatorum purgatio.[49]

> [*Putatio* (pruning) is said of opinion. It derives from *puto*, *-tas* which is 'to think, to presume'. It is said of trimming the superfluous branches from the vines and the trees and as such it derives from *puto*, *-tas* that is 'to purify' (*purgo*, *-as*). It is said of the purification of sins.]

In his treatises, Alan applies this same etymological technique to explain his use of certain terms. As we saw, this was the way he interpreted the meaning of the different rules that he distinguished in his *Regulae caelestis iuris*. He applied an etymological decomposition of the chosen terms in order to give them the meaning he wants the reader to keep in mind. In contrast to his prologue to the *Anticlaudianus*, for example, he calls the rules for mathematics

> arismetica porismata, i.e. regulas subtiles que speculanti quodam modo in premium cedunt propter subtilem earum intelligentiam. Unde porismata quasi premia nuncupantur. Porisma enim Grece, Latine premium dicitur.[50]

> [*porismata*, which means subtle rules which the studious scholar will somehow be rewarded with due to their subtle understanding. That is why they are called *porismata* as if rewards. For *porisma* in Greek means what in Latin is said 'reward' (*premium*).]

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[48] Alan of Lille, *Distinctiones dictionum theologicalium*, ed. by Migne, col. 718.

[49] Alan of Lille, *Distinctiones dictionum theologicalium*, ed. by Migne, col. 916.

[50] Alan of Lille, '*Regulae caelestis iuris*', Prologue 1, ed. by Häring, p. 121.

Similarly, Alan treats the highest rules for theological science that culminate in the *ebdomades*, 'that is the dignities. For *ebda* in Greek is said "dignity" in Latin'.[51]

We already noticed how, in his Prologue to the *Anticlaudianus*, Alan restored this last term to its actual meaning of septenary and assigned it to astronomy. Simultaneously, however, he alluded to his interpretation in the *Regulae* by accompanying it in the text by a Latin synonym for dignities: *excellentia*.[52] This way he applied a third explanatory technique as mentioned by Peter Helias. For, after having defined both the *etymologia per expositionem* and the *etymologia per derivationem*, Peter Helias continues:

> [Ethimologia d]iffert autem ab interpretatione que est translatio de una loquela in aliam. Ethimologia vero fit sepius in eadem loquela.[53]

> [[Etymologia], however, differs from interpretation which is the translation from one language into another. For etymology more often occurs in the same language.]

This last sentence actually implies two different additional types of explanatory techniques. First, when of strange origin, thus mostly Greek, it can be translated (*interpretatio*). But what when it concerns a Latin word that is explained by one or more Latin words? According to Peter Helias, this might still be considered etymology, and it seems that this is the way Alan also applied it.[54]

A more important observation, however, is the way Alan makes use of all these different techniques in the prologue to his epic. He does not apply them in an explicit way. Yet a correct understanding of Alan's text depends to a large extent on the reader's capacity to grasp the underlying explanatory techniques that give him a hold upon the meaning of the text. Alan's poetics seem entirely based upon these implicit explanatory allusions, that is, without giving any explicit decomposition or derivation, but solely juxtapositioning terms or ele-

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[51] Alan of Lille, *Regulae caelestis iuris*, Prologue 6: 'propter sui auctoritatem *ebdomades* i.e. dignitates dicuntur. Ebda enim Grece, Latine dignitas dicitur' (ed. by Häring, p. 122).

[52] Although it can be that the play is even subtler, because in his *Regulae caelestis iuris*, Alan qualifies the rules for astronomy as follows: 'Suas etiam maximas habet astronomia quas excellentias vocant propter sui dignitatem et intelligentie subtilitatem'. Alan of Lille, '*Regulae caelestis iuris*', Prologue 4, ed. by Häring, p. 122.

[53] Peter Helias, *Summa super Priscianum*; quoted in Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, p. 13, n. 17.

[54] In his *Distinctiones dictionum theologicalium* Alan appears to make a clear distinction between explanation by translation (always ruled by the verb *interpretatur*) and by description (always ruled by the form *dicitur*). In his other works, this difference seems less strictly kept.

ments of which he supposes that his readers must be able to see and interpret the inner connections.

This poetical technique constituted the key to a correct understanding of both his qualification of the ideal reader of his poem and the educational progression his poem implies. Moreover, it seems to offer us one of the fundamental technical tools behind Alan's construction of epic characters and settings: they all become understandable by way of this implicit etymology and translation. In short, one could characterize Alan's poetics not as the application of the different techniques of etymology and translation (and for that reason allegorization[55]) but as the application of their results. In his *Anticlaudianus*, Alan challenges the readers to retrace the path he went down in order to construct the poem the way he did. His allegorical epic is the outcome of all kinds of explanatory techniques that remain out of sight.

Creative Etymology or How to Give Life to Allegory

A similar understanding of the poem might provoke the most subjective and individualistic associations of words and interpretations without any claim at all to scientific value. At least in modern sense. But it offers an exquisite opportunity for poets to define their own vocabulary and imagery by juxtaposition and circumscription. Alan makes it into the cornerstone of his entire poem as becomes clear by his presentation of the text's protagonists. I want to limit myself here to the interpretation of the heroine in the first half of the epic, Prudentia, whose name alternates during the epic with that of Fronesis,[56] while she gets closely associated with both Sapientia and Sophia.[57] Regarding the importance Alan gives to the significance of words and names, the reader would do him no justice if he does not consider these varied applications as meaningful.

[55] See for a distinction between allegorical interpretation and allegorical composition and the different approaches they imply, Whitman, *Allegory*, pp. 3–10. It remains to my opinion one of the best treatments of allegory in view of its twelfth-century representatives. Also Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry*.

[56] The substitution of Prudentia by Fronesis can be considered another example of Alan's application of the technique *etymologia per translationem*.

[57] The apparent synonymy of those names has lead most translators and commentators to make no distinction between them (see Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, ed. by Bossuat, in his *Index Nominum*). Either they use the names as they appear in the poem without further comment (so Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, trans. by Sheridan), or they simply bring them together under one common denominator, mostly something like Wisdom (so Alan of Lille, *Viaggio della saggezza*, ed. by Chiurco).

Prudentia enters the epic as a member of the council that Nature convokes in order to ask for advice in the creation of the New Man. She appears as one of Nature's fifteen sisters, sharing the verse with Decus:[58] 'et Decus, et cuncta trutinans Prudentia libra' (1.40). When in Book VII all the sisters invest the New Man with their gifts, Decus appears again just before Prudentia, there Fronesis. Decus gives man not beauty nor dignity, but she rather clothes all the previous gifts with her own reverence thus making him shine like the rose among the flowers.[59] She is thus the virtue that makes all that one receives fit together, makes them apt and fitting to each other (*decens*). Once again, this shows how careful Alan is in choosing names and words so that they fit to what they are supposed to mean.

It is necessary to be aware of Alan's semantic accuracy in order to understand the appearance of Prudentia. Alan describes her with a balance in her hand on which she weighs everything. According to his descriptive method of etymology, we may expect this to give the sense of what Prudentia actually means to him. By way of the balance, the reader must understand the heroine and her actions inside the poem. Up to this point in the text, the mentioning of a pair of scales has occurred twice. When Nature starts planning to create the New Man, she does not rush headlong into the project, but she 'weighs every detail in the scales of reason'.[60] In the prose prologue, Alan recommended his poem especially to those readers who are capable of 'weighing with the sure scales of discernment what is worthy to be spread far and wide into public hearing or should rather be buried deep in silence'.[61] The balance thus is linked to both reason and discernment.

In the row of Nature's sisters, a bit earlier than Prudentia, *Ratio*, Reason, appeared already. Alan makes a difference between Prudentia and Reason. And indeed, in his small treatise on the virtues, the vices, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he defines *prudentia* as 'the discernment between good and evil and between themselves, together with the rejection of evil and the election

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[58] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, trans. by Sheridan, p. 46, translated as Decorum.

[59] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, VII.224–26: 'et cultu proprio Decus omnia uestit, | Non minus irradians aliarum facta sororum | Quam rosa cognatos flores'.

[60] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, I.17: 'Nec subitos animi motus perpessa, repente | Currit ad hec opera, sed ad hec deliberat utrum | Possit et ad libram racionis singula pensat' (trans. by Sheridan, p. 45).

[61] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, Prologue in prose: 'certa discretionis libra pensantes quid sit dignum in aures publicas promulgari uel silentio penitus sepeliri' (trans. by Sheridan, p. 42, with adaptations).

of good'.[62] Furthermore, he continues in distinguishing the different aspects of *prudentia*: 'According to the philosophers, *prudentia* is divided into the following aspects: intellect, reason, foresight, circumspection, teachability, caution'.[63] Each of these aspects is then defined and tentatively circumscribed. Reason, to Alan, is not equivalent to *prudentia*, but rather one of the natural faculties by which the human soul can acquire the virtue of *prudentia*.[64]

Prudentia in the epic thus has to be considered the personification of discernment or *discretio*. Her task will be 'to weigh' everything in order to distinguish between good and evil, but also between good and better and between bad and worse.[65] As such she acts when giving her opinion about Nature's project to create the New Man. First, she is described *in extenso*. Everything is in harmony, her hair, the arches of her eyebrows, the colour on her face, her breasts and her limbs, her dress (1.270–315).[66] But this harmony is not a natu-

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[62] Alan of Lille, *De Virtutibus et de Vitiis et de Donis Spiritus Sancti*, 2: 'De virtutibus cardinalibus: Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum et utrarumque discretio cum mali fuga et electione boni' ('Le Traité d'Alain de Lille sur les vertus, les vices et les dons du Saint-Esprit', ed. by Lottin, p. 29).

[63] Alan of Lille, *De Virtutibus et de Vitiis et de Donis Spiritus Sancti*, 2: 'De virtutibus cardinalibus: Secundum philosophos autem in hec dividitur prudentia, scilicet in intellectum, rationem, providentiam, circumspectionem, docibilitatem, cautionem' ('Le Traité d'Alain de Lille sur les vertus, les vices et les dons du Saint-Esprit', ed. by Lottin, p. 29). Alan bases his argument on the text of the *Moralium dogma philosophorum*; see 'Le Traité d'Alain de Lille sur les Vertus, les Vices et les Dons du Saint-Esprit', ed. by Lottin, pp. 21–22 and 29, n. 3.

[64] In his discussion on the question if these aspects have to be reckoned among the virtues or not, Alan distances himself from his sources in considering them natural faculties (*naturales potentie*), because one can abuse them which is impossible as regards virtues. Alan of Lille, 'Le Traité d'Alain de Lille sur les vertus, les vices et les dons du Saint-Esprit', ed. by Lottin, p. 29. In her appearance in the *Anticlaudianus*, Ratio is presented almost as Prudentia's alter ego: 'Suntque relatiue facies: gerit altera formam | Alterius seseque sibi conformat in illa. | Vna sibi facies faciem presentat utramque' (1.441–43).

[65] Alan of Lille, *De Virtutibus et de Vitiis et de Donis Spiritus Sancti*, 2: 'De virtutibus cardinalibus: Utrarumque ideo apponitur, quia non sufficit bona et mala a se invicem dividere, sed etiam bona ab invicem, et mala ab invicem, id est bona a melioribus en minus bonis, et mala a peioribus et minus malis' ('Le Traité d'Alain de Lille sur les vertus, les vices et les dons du Saint-Esprit', ed. by Lottin, p. 29). Besides, the verb *trutinare* that Alan uses in Prudentia's description is equated by him to *inquirere*. Alan of Lille, *Distinctiones dictionum theologicalium*: 'Trutinare, proprie. Notat etiam inquirere' (ed. by Migne, col. 981).

[66] Notably in the opening verses of this description, words for modesty and equilibrium abound: *gestus modesti* (1.270), *circumscripta modum* (1.271), *mediata refrenat* (1.272), *regula pectinis* (1.273), *ordo — iusto libramine* (1.274), *nec nimis — nec multa* (1.275). The order is only disrupted by the garment which suffers from old age and from being locally ripped to pieces

ral one as it is in the appearance of her sister Concordia, whose hair remains in order without any difficulty.[67] Prudentia needs effort and tools to attain this equilibrium: her hair is submitted to the 'rule' of her comb (*regula pectinis*) and kept in place with a hairpin (*acus*).

When she consequently puts into words her reaction to Nature's proposal, she does so in a perfectly balanced speech: in twenty-nine verses, she first gives her approval to the plan (1.326–54), then she expounds in forty verses the objections she sees (1.355–94), after which she concludes in thirty verses by admitting her incapacity to decide in either sense (1.395–424). Her discourse thus nicely weighs arguments *pro* against *contra*, giving the last ones more weight and thus concluding with a doubtful but rather negative ending. Exactly in the middle of her speech, she introduces the divine artificer whose assistance is required to complete the celestial part of the work.[68]

Both in her appearance and in her words, Prudentia thus meets the definition Alan has given of her in his other works. She is the personification of discernment, trying to install order by always weighing up both sides of the controversy and doing so in absolute impartiality. Of course, this raises the question why Alan then thought it useful and necessary to endow particularly Prudentia, of all figures, with several names. Her second name Fronesis is mentioned by Ratio for the first time. Prudentia finishes her speech with an appeal to Ratio that she may decide what should be done (1.417–19). Ratio is described in a completely different way from Prudentia. She has three mirrors in her hand, and Alan constructs her description around the echoing of words and images.

(1.310–15). This draws Prudentia near to the figure of Philosophia in Boethius's *De consolatione* 1.pr.1 (Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, trans. by Sheridan, p. 58, n. 60) but also to Alan's own depiction of Nature in his *De planctu Naturae* 11, whose tunic shows similar traces of violence, exactly in the place where man ought to penetrate heaven with reason as his charioteer: 'In huius uestis parte primaria homo, sensualitatis deponens segniciem, directa ratiocinationis aurigatione, celi penetrabat archana. In qua parte tunica, suarum partium passa dissidium, suarum iniuriarum contumelias demonstrabat. In reliquis tamen locis partes, eleganti continuatione concordes, nullam diuisionis in se sustinebant discordiam' (Alan of Lille, '*De Planctu naturae*', ed. by Häring, p. 817).

[67] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, 11.169–73: 'Pacem sponte tenet crinis flammancior auro, | Se sibi conciliat nec opem sibi pectinis optat; | Sed sibi sufficiens in tanta pace quiescit | Vt nec perflantis Boree suspiria crinem | Sollicitare queant litisque creare tumultum'. Compare to Prudentia's hair (1.271–73): 'Colla pererrat | Aurea cesaries, sed acus mediata refrenat | Litigium crinis et regula pectinis instat'.

[68] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, 1.175–76: 'Artificis melioris opem celestis origo | postulat'.

He presents Ratio as an alter ego of Prudentia, whom she resembles in all, except age, being much older than her sister.[69] Her speech, however, does not resemble that of Prudentia. It follows a logical argumentation, first opposing Nature's words to those of Prudentia, then offering a solution.[70] Thereupon, Ratio brings to the fore a new problem: to whom can the legacy be trusted?[71] Again, she gives an immediate solution by marking out Prudentia as the suitable candidate.[72] In order to endorse her choice, Ratio launches into an elaborate praise of Prudentia whose search for God's mysteries cannot be halted by any obstacle.[73] She evokes Prudentia's sounding of the influences of the planets and her investigation of the weather signs and origins.[74] Thus, she concludes, who else could receive the name of our envoy as Fronesis with whom all God's secrets converse?

Prudentia gets her second name in Ratio's speech after the long description of her search for insight in the astronomical and meteorological phenomena.[75] From that point on, Fronesis is her more frequent denominator.[76] In

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[69] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, I.436–49. The echoing effect is reached on the sonorous level by way of multiple alliterations, on the verbal level by way of repeated anaphors, on the syntactic level by way of parallelism as well as chiasm. The three mirrors refer to Bernard Silvestris's *Cosmographia*, where they are the present of Noys to the three goddesses that have to create man, Urania, Physis, and Natura: *Microcosmus* 11.3. (Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, ed. by Dronke, p. 142; Bernard Silvestris, *Poetic Works*, ed. by Wetherbee, pp. 144–45).

[70] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, II.42–56 (Nature's words), 57–64 (Prudentia's words), 65–74 (solution). Ratio starts with a long declaration of her own incapacity to fulfil Prudentia's requirements.

[71] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, II.90–94: 'Restat in ambiguo nec certa luce patescit | Que nostrum, quibus auxiliis, quo calle uiarum | In superas deuecta domos, donetur honore | Legati, que uota Deo presentet et, instans | Imbre precum, precibus diuinas compluat aures'.

[72] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, II.95–98: 'Sed tamen, ut proprie mentis sentencia dictat, | Nulla potest melius istius muneris usum | Amplecti quam nostra soror Prudencia, cuius | Debellare nequit uirtutem turba laborum'.

[73] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, II.99–107.

[74] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, II.107–45.

[75] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, II.146–47: 'Ergo que melius legati nomen inibit | Quam Fronesis, cui cuncta Dei secreta loquuntur?' Remarkably, Alan uses the verb *providere* only three times in the entire epic: once in Prudentia's speech, twice in that of Ratio. Thus, the link between Prudentia and Providentia is clearly installed without them being put on a par, as Providentia is restricted to God whereas Prudentia encompasses humankind also.

[76] Prudentia appears twenty-six times in all books, except Books III, VII, and IX. Fronesis is used thirty-seven times in all books with the exception of Books I, III, and VIII.

Alan's works, *fronesis* only appears in the *Anticlaudianus*, unlike *prudentia*. The connection between *fronesis* and *prudentia* antedates the twelfth century and can already be found in the *Ecloga Theoduli* (tenth century?), where Fronesis appears as the judge who has to decide in the context between Pseustis (Lie) and Alitia (Truth). The poem belonged to the school readings. Sigebert of Gembloux named the poet in his list of illustrious writers and commented upon the name: 'Fronesis is called after prudentia, because she examines what is doubtful'.[77]

More important for us to understand Alan's choice is Fronesis's appearance during the twelfth century, where John of Salisbury mentions her as the sister of Alitia and the mother of Philologia who is wed to Mercurius in Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. For, as he says, '*prudentia* is the sister of truth and, by way of eloquence, she makes the love of reason and of science fertile and illustrious'.[78] In the *Metalogicon*, his book on the education and the schools, John of Salisbury often speaks about Fronesis. He even dedicates a chapter to her family relations that is of great interest for Alan's readers.

> Et quia ueritas prudentiae materia est, nam in ueri comprehensione laborat, finxerunt antiqui Fronesin et Alitiam esse germanas, eo quod prudentiae cum ueritate est quaedam diuina cognatio. Inde est quod ab aspectu ueritatis prudentia si perfecta est, nequit arceri. Verum quia haec hominum non est, latens uerum auide quaerit infirma condicio. Et quidem propter fallacias sensuum et opinionum, uix in eius inuestigatione fideliter incedit, uix est in comprehensione secura. Recolit enim se deceptam esse, et posse decipi. Sollicitatur ergo ut firma perceptione gaudeat, indubitatoque iudicio quod potest ratio appellari. Siquidem ratum et firmum est rationis examen. Philologiam ergo parit Fronesis, dum amor ueri sollicitat prudentiam ad notitiam rerum, de quibus ferri uult sincerum firmumque iudicium.[79]

> [Truth is the material of *prudentia*, as she forces herself to comprehension of truth. Therefore, the ancients considered Fronesis and Alitia to be sisters while there exists some divine relationship between *prudentia* and truth. For that reason, if *prudentia*

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[77] Sigebert of Gembloux, *De viris illustribus* 135: 'Phronesim a prudentia dictam, per quam dubia examinantur' ('Catalogus de viris illustribus', ed. by Witte, p. 90).

[78] John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* II.3, l. 16: 'Vt diuertamus ad fabulas, Fronesin sororem Alitiae, nec sterilem reputauit antiquitas, sed egregiam eius subolem castis Mercurii iunxit amplexibus. Est enim soror ueritatis prudentia, et amorem rationis et scientiae per eloquentiam fecundat, et illustrat' (*Metalogicon*, ed. by Hall and Keats-Rohan).

[79] John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* IV.14, l. 3, ed. by Hall and Keats-Rohan. The *Metalogicon* was finished in 1159, thus several decades before Alan started writing his poem. On the possible influence of John's work on Alan's thinking and writing, no study has yet been undertaken, as far as my knowledge goes.

is perfect, she cannot be held back from the sight of truth. But as this is not given to humans, her weak condition seeks eagerly for the hidden truth. But because of the fallacies of the senses and of opinions, she hardly advances on her investigation in faith. She can hardly be sure of what she comprehends. She remembers that she has been deceived and that she can be deceived. For that reason and in order to enjoy a firm perception and a steadfast judgement, she does an appeal to what one could call reason. For indeed, reason's scrutiny is sure and firm. Fronesis gives birth to Philologia, as soon as love for truth pushes *prudentia* to a notion of those things about which she wants to communicate a sincere and firm judgement.]

These few lines anticipate the entire interaction between Prudentia and Ratio in the *Anticlaudianus*: Prudentia's hesitation and appeal to reason, Reason's firm scrutiny of 'those things about which [Prudentia] wants to communicate'. The fragment even makes it plausible that Alan takes the name of Fronesis as an equivalent to Philologia, born as soon as Prudentia gets notion of the things of reality.[80] The reason for this name-switching seems clear: his concepts do not give birth. They are maidens, and they cannot give birth but to themselves. Prudentia can be the mother of Fronesis by way of reason.[81] Prudentia she is called whenever her acts originate in discernment and she thus is subject to doubts. Fronesis is her name as soon as the doubts are quietened.[82]

[80] Alan nowhere uses *philologia* in his conceptual poem, neither in any of his other writings, as far as it was possible for me to verify. There is one exception; in the *Hierarchia Alani*, Alan draws a parallel between the naming of *theologia* and the denominators for philosophical knowledge: 'Theologia est humana scientia qua deus ab homine intelligitur, que temperato vocabulo non theosophia vel theophania sed theologia dicitur, ad insinuandum quod ab homine Deus in presenti per speculum in enigmate videtur, sicut philosophi scientiam suam non sophiam sed philosophiam vel phil. nuncupaverunt ad significandum quod ab homine in presenti plena et perfecta non potest haberi notitia' (see note 22, above, for the source and the translation). The editor rendered the abbreviation as *filologiam (?)*, showing her uncertainty about the conjecture. This seems convincing, however, given the way others use the term and notably the repeated similarity with the words of John of Salisbury in his *Metalogicon* (see the previous note). Alan clearly prefers the term *philosophia* that he uses more often.

[81] Alan avoids parental lineages in his epic. Nature convokes her sisters, but nowhere are their common parents specified. More remarkable even, among her sisters is also Nobilitas who is the only one in the entire poem who is explicitly linked to her mother Fortuna. Yet it is obvious that neither Natura nor her other sisters can be considered stemming from the same mother. Alan uses the parental lines only for subordinate elements (the horses of the chariot for example) or, of course, for the divine lineage of Father, Son, and the Virgin Mother.

[82] This seems confirmed by the rest of the poem. Alan shows a conscious distribution of the use of the names. Fronesis is used notably during the celestial voyage (Books v and vi).

Alan on Giants' Shoulders or How to Bring the Past to Perfection

Choice and use of the names thus turn out to be essential for understanding Alan's poem in the right way. One of the approaches to come to the right interpretation is to make use of the cross-references to Alan's other works and to those of his contemporaries, in our case John of Salisbury. This way is open to modern scholars. But might one assume Alan's own readers' public having the same possibilities as we have with our electronic search machines? They surely could rely on more developed mnemonic capacities than we do, but we must expect that Alan handed over some clues inside the poem.

As we saw, he does. As the basic tool in constructing his poem he used the implicit explanatory techniques of *etymologia per expositionem* besides translation, the more traditional *etymologia per derivationem*, and a sort of descriptive etymology. Throughout his works, Alan uses all approaches, but he gives priority to the derivational interpretation of terms in his technical and didactical treatises whereas in his poetical or literary works the descriptive method becomes the active poetical tool that gives him the opportunity to create a closed poetic universe. Alan imposes upon his readers a strictly limited interpretation of his terms and names by 'describing' them in the attributes and actions he attributes to them. This explains the importance he gives to long static descriptions of his characters, their tools, and their deeds. Each of them must also be read as the *expositio* of the ruling term. The poet only cancelled the usual syntactical conjunctions.[83] He exchanges the explicative language of his didactic commentaries for a highly poetic expressivity and density.

Alan was not the first to use this 'expositional' etymology as a poetic tool, but he was one of the first to make it into the poetical foundation of an entire poet's activity. He did base his poetics, however, on the work of predecessors. Actually, the descriptive etymology possibly can be recognized as a creative force in literary (or perhaps more precisely, rhetorical or poetical) texts before becoming the subject of grammatical or dialectical treatises. Remarkably, its appearance seems from the beginning strongly connected to allegorical texts or texts that are normally treated as such.[84]

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[83] See Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, pp. 61–70, for telling illustrations in the commentaries.

[84] As to a legitimate caution upon the scholarly employment of the term 'allegory' for some twelfth-century texts, see Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry*, who rightly remarks that Alan's poem 'gives little promise of the creative indirectness of allegory; instead, the action of the poem at its literal surface is intensely conceptual, and has the appearance more of the

Sigebert of Gembloux

An early example is offered by Sigebert of Gembloux in his *De passione sanctorum Thebeorum* (*c.* 1070).[85] In the introduction to the actual poem, Sigebert evokes how he ended up at the palace of Philosophia.[86] He did not dare to enter and remained with the unnamed people in the doorway. The entrance was only open to those who were noble of life.[87] Inside he sees first of all the Doctors of the Church. They enjoy the meal and the music that is offered to them by the hagiographers, most of them poets. Both groups are presented in different catalogues, those of the Doctors as a simple enumeration, but the other one in a much more poetical elaboration.[88]

The dishes are served by Juvencus and Sedulius. As the most ancient of the poets, they are named first. But the idea of making them into the table stewards derives from a humorous touch, based upon the application of *etymologia* as a poetical tool. Both offer goblets foaming with the new wine of the gospels. Juvencus does so by immolating the fatted calf, Sedulius by bringing forth the paschal dishes.[89] The play on Juvencus's name that actually means a bull calf is obvious. Sigebert thus applies an *etymologia per derivationem* but gives the joke also a double sense by linking it to the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15. 12–32).[90]

Sedulius is honoured with bringing in the dishes, because of the opening verse of his Easter poem: 'Whoever you are who asks as a table companion for the paschal dishes, | take your place as a worthy guest at our meal'.[91] Here

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product of, than the occasion for, allegoresis' (pp. 57–58). I hope my argumentation has been able to prove that the 'appearance' of being a product of allegoresis indeed holds true.

[85] Sigebert of Gembloux, *Passio Sanctae Luciae Virginis und Passio Sanctorum Thebeorum*, ed. by Dümmler, pp. 44–125.

[86] Sigebert of Gembloux, *Passio Sanctorum Thebeorum*, Prologus 37–38: 'aulae mirificae tibi philosophia dicatae | impegi foribus uixque steti pedibus' (ed. by Dümmler, p. 45).

[87] Sigebert of Gembloux, *Passio Sanctorum Thebeorum*, Prologus 57–58: 'Restat pro foribus mecum sine nomine uulgus | uita nobilibus hic patet introitus' (ed. by Dümmler, p. 45).

[88] The group of ten Doctors occupies only three verses (Prologus 65–67). The hagiographic group counts fifteen writers and twenty-four verses (Prologus 91–114).

[89] Sigebert of Gembloux, *Passio Sanctorum Thebeorum*, Prologus 91–94: 'Ecce saginatum uitulum mactando Iuuencus | ponens paschales Seduliusque dapes | dant euangelico feruentia pocula musto | dignus uase liquor atque liquore sapor' (ed. by Dümmler, p. 46).

[90] Notably Luke 15. 23: 'Adducite vitulum saginatum et occidite et manducemus et epulemur'.

[91] Sedulius, *Carmen Paschale*, Praefatio 1: 'Paschales quicumque dapes conuiua requiris, | Dignatus nostris accubitare toris'.

the play is more complex and rather based upon an associative explanation, in which the poet's part is explained by his own words. Remarkably enough, Sigebert uses the presentation of a poet with his own work on the same level of and immediately linked to the truly etymological application in the verse dedicated to Juvencus.[92]

Bernard Silvestris

More important than Sigebert's playful and occasional application to understand Alan's use of *etymologia* in the twelfth-century sense as a poetical tool are two other writers that had a truly profound influence on the writing of the *Anticlaudianus*. Alan proves to be well acquainted with their writings that stem from the generation just before him.

His most obvious and most studied precursor was Bernard Silvestris, without whose *Cosmographia* (*c.* 1150) Alan's poem is simply inconceivable. Actually, Alan seems to have been strongly occupied with Bernard's work for a long period, because he already wrote a direct response in his *De planctu Naturae* some twenty years before the *Anticlaudianus*. In his *De planctu*, he kept himself to Bernard's literary form of the prosimetrum, alternating passages in prose and poetry. Yet, at the same time, he does much more than simply rewriting his model. He takes a clear position as to Bernard's use of the form and to his content.[93] For one thing, he returns to the ultimate model for medieval prosimetra, Boethius. While Bernard uses the form for a narrative development, in which the prosaic and poetic passages alternate without clear functional distinction, Alan returns to the more philosophical construction, confronting himself as the narrator with the superhuman personification of Natura. He also neatly

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[92] Sigebert applies the last technique with one of the other poets in the catalogue. Of Prudentius, third in the row, he says: 'Ymnizat, pugnat Prudentius atque coronat' (95). This verse enumerates the three most popular and known works by Prudentius: his book of (daily) hymns (*Liber Cathemerinon*), his *Psychomachia*, and his book on martyrs (*Peristefanon*, literally *On the crown*).

[93] In his *Expositio prosae de angelis* he even criticizes Bernard Silvestris for having applied the singular when, in his *Cosmographia*, speaking of the plurality of the highest angelic hierarchies: 'Unde Bernardus Silvestris distinctione Ierarchiarum peccasse videtur, nomine unius de ordine ipsum ordinem designans cum ait: Ad sensum perfecta cherub propiusque magisque | Cernit in archanis consiliisque Dei. Nomen pluralis numeri quo ordo designatur in singulari numero posuit, dicens: Quam secus ardescit Seraphin' (Alan of Lille, *Textes inédits*, ed. by d'Alverny, p. 212). Cf. Bernard Silvester, *Megacosmos* III.13 in *Cosmographia*, ed. by Dronke, p. 104.

separates the contents of the poetry from the prose, avoiding the repetitions that occur in Bernard's text.

The critical reading of his precursor did not prevent Alan from drawing inspiration from Bernard's poetics. One of the aspects he could have discovered in the *Cosmographia* is the poetical potentiality of the recent views on *etymologia*. Bernard opens his work with a highly poetical section in which he makes the most of what we have labelled the descriptive etymology. He took up the project of transforming the philosophical discourse of Plato's *Timaeus* into an allegorical narrative that did justice both to Plato's intention (as commented upon by the late antique Chalicidius and by the twelfth-century philosopher William of Conches) and to the biblical account of creation. This obliged him to identify Platonic conceptions with the divine actions from Genesis. Clear definitions thus were essential to a correct understanding of what he was trying to convey. But as he was not writing a commentary but a poetical work, he could not handle it in the same technical way. He had to present his figurations in the poem itself, which he could do by 'exposing' their significance.

A quick look at Bernard's other writings is illuminating as far as concerns his view on allegory. A few commentaries are transmitted in his name that focus strongly on the allegorical interpretation of texts as they were used in the schools. Of particular importance is the commentary on the first six books of the *Aeneid*. Here he distinguishes the actual storyline in its artificial order from the hidden philosophical significance that follows the natural order and that recounts the story of human life:

> Scribit ergo in quantum est philosophus humane vite naturam. Modus agendi talis est: in integumento describit quid agat vel quid pactiatur humanus spiritus in humano corpore temporaliter positus. Atque in hoc describendo naturali utitur ordine atque ita utrumque ordinem narrationis observat, artificialem poeta, naturalem philosophus.[94]

> [As a philosopher, [Virgil] writes the nature of human life. He does this as follows: he describes under cover (*in integumento*) what the human spirit does and what it suffers while it is temporarily placed in a human body. And in describing this he applies a natural order. Thus, he adheres to both narrative orders: as a poet, he follows the artificial one, as a philosopher the natural one.]

Bernard immediately continues in defining what he understands by the crucial term *integumentum*:

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[94] Bernard Silvestris, *Commentum Super Sex Libros Eneidos Virgilii*, Praefatio 3, *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the Aeneid of Vergil*, ed. by Jones and Jones, p. 3.

Integumentum est genus demonstrationis sub fabulosa narratione veritatis invol-
vens intellectum, unde etiam dicitur involucrum.[95]

[Under cover I mean a sort of presentation that under a fictitious narration involves
an understanding of the truth. That is why it is also called an *involucrum*.]

Bernard considers the *integumentum* to belong to the creative action of the
writer who covers his understanding of truth underneath a fictitious narration.
The task of the commentator is to uncover this truth, to make it understand-
able by lifting up the *integumentum*/*involucrum* and to show the natural order
of philosophical truth hidden under the artificial order of poetical fiction.

When turning from a commentator of poetry into a poet himself, Bernard
had to go the opposite way: creating a poetical fiction that could convey philo-
sophical truth. Only, if he did not want to remain stuck in poetical fiction for
itself but make it convey the philosophical truth he wanted to transmit to his
readers, he had to leave behind all figurative senses of the words. He could only
use words that meant what they were, what they expressed, and what they did.
The *Cosmographia* is the result of his attempt to fulfil these requirements.

The first part of the *Cosmographia*, the *Megacosmus*, opens with a poetical
complaint of Nature on matter stuck in its primordial chaos. The first verses
describe this state of matter under its philosophical designation as *Silva*.

> Congeries informis adhuc, cum Silva teneret
> sub veteri confusa globo primordia rerum.

[When Silva, still a formless pile, held on to the first beginnings of things, confus-
edly being under its ancient mass.][96]

The reader gets a description of the philosophical sense of Silva that could as well
be read as 'congeries informis *dicitur* Silva quasi tenens sub veteri confusa globo
primordia rerum': 'the formless pile is said of Silva to be understood as holding
on to the first beginnings of things, confusedly being under the ancient mass'.

The following verses, in which Nature addresses Noys with her complaint,
can be read in a similar way as a descriptive *expositio* on the philosophical sense
of Noys but while introducing Christian elements:

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[95] Bernard Silvestris, *Commentum Super Sex Libros Eneidos Virgilii*, Praefatio 3, *The
Commentary on the First Six Books of the Aeneid of Vergil*, ed. by Jones and Jones, p. 3.

[96] Bernard Silvestris, *Megacosmus* 1.1–2 (*Cosmographia*, ed. by Dronke, p. 97). All transla-
tions of Bernard Silvestris are based upon Bernard Silvestris, *Poetic Works*, ed. by Wetherbee; see
here p. 9, but with adaptations.

> visa Deo Natura queri, mentemque profundam
> compellasse Noym: 'Vitae viventis imago,
> prima, Noys — deus — orta deo, substantia veri,
> consilii tenor eterni, michi vera Minerva'.

[Nature seemed to complain to God and to have appealed the unfathomable mind, Noys: 'Image of the living life, the first one, Noys, God, born from God, substance of truth, holder of eternal deliberation, true Minerva to me'.][97]

Bernard starts by announcing the philosophical sense of the figuration he is going to introduce: 'the unfathomable mind' (*mens profunda*), that is, Noys, who then is further equated with epithets that all have a biblical or Christian ring. These epithets all make Noys into the equivalent for Christ as Divine Wisdom and are based upon the evocation of Wisdom in the book of Proverbs.[98]

Like in Alan, in both cases the Greek name is preceded by a Latin circumscription that captures the philosophical sense, after which it is specified by either a poetic definition (Silva) or a poetic accumulation of epithets that Christianize the concept (Noys). Somewhat further in the opening poem, Bernard repeats this procedure, giving a series of epithets for Silva.[99] This allows him to introduce some other philosophical conceptions: *chaos*, *Usia*, *massa*. He does the same with Noys who in the following passage in prose defines herself as 'God's reason', whom 'the First Being begot from herself as another herself not in time but out of that eternal being in which it abides'.[100] Whereas the evocation of Silva remains in the philosophical field, Noys becomes more and more identified to the Wisdom of Christ.

This implicit use of a sort of 'descriptive-etymological allegory' inspired Alan to his own poetical application by which he brought the technique to a culmination. Like Bernard, Alan keeps himself to a natural narrative order that befits philosophical truth, according to what Bernard professed in his com-

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[97] Bernard Silvestris, *Megacosmus* 1.3–6 (*Cosmographia*, ed. by Dronke, p. 97; *Poetic Works*, ed. by Wetherbee, p. 9 with adaptations).

[98] *Proverbia* 8. 22–30, but see notably the verses 22–23: 'Dominus possedit me in initio viarum suarum | antequam quidquam faceret a principio. | Ab æterno ordinata sum, | et ex antiquis antequam terra fieret'. (Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, ed. by Dronke, p. 163).

[99] Bernard Silvestris, *Megacosmus* 1.18–19: 'Silva rigens, informe chaos, concretio pugnax, | discolor Usie vultus, sibi dissona massa' (*Cosmographia*, ed. by Dronke, p. 97).

[100] Bernard Silvestris, *Megacosmus* 2.1: 'Noys ego, dei ratio profundius exquisite, quam utique de se, alteram se, Usia prima genuit — non in tempore sed ex eo quo consistit eterno' (*Cosmographia*, ed. by Dronke, p. 99; *Poetic Works*, ed. by Wetherbee, pp. 13–15 with adaptations).

mentary on the *Aeneid*. Like Bernard, Alan explains his personifications while introducing them. He only does so by using more and stronger poetic means and instruments. In contrast to Bernard's work, for example, Alan involves narrative action in the descriptive and 'expositional' etymology of the names. Another precursor seems to have inspired him here, whom scholarship has much less brought in contact with him.

Bernard of Clairvaux

Simultaneously to Bernard's composition of his allegorical masterpiece on creation, a namesake of his was also dedicating his attention to the literary possibilities of allegory. Bernard of Clairvaux is mostly remembered for his political and ecclesiastical influence. That his writing earns him a place among the best Latin prose stylists is too often forgotten, as well as the fact that he was a crucial figure in the revolution of twelfth-century literature. Yet he seems to have been one of the first to explore the narrative potentialities of allegorical figuration.

Several allegorical narratives by Bernard of Clairvaux are known. The most developed ones have been published among his collected works under the title of Parables, *Parabolae*.[101] They were never regarded as a collection in its own right, and they were only edited as such in modern times. Bernard does not seem to have paid particular attention to these texts, in contrast to most of the texts he planned to edit himself. This does not mean, however, that he despised allegory as a narrative tool. Some of his most elaborated and most often revisited texts contain important allegorical figurations such as his sermon to the clerics on conversion (the allegory of reason and will) and his first sermon for the solemnity of Annunciation (the allegory of the heavenly dispute). Furthermore, drafts for allegorical storylines can be found in his books of *Sententiae*, short texts that probably served as a kind of archives or storehouse for ideas that he could reuse in his sermons or other writings.

One of the themes that Bernard explores recurrently in his texts is the capture and liberation of the human soul. Often it is presented as the war between the kingdoms of Jerusalem and Babylon with the imprisonment of a knight or of a kingly son by the forces of Babylon, the personified vices. The prisoner is liberated by the virtues, starting with Timor and Spes or Oboedientia, who put him on the horse of desire and bring him in safety to a castle, that of Pietas or

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[101] For studies on Bernard's *Parabolae*, see Bruun, *Parables* and Timmermann, *Studien zur allegorischen Bildlichkeit in den Parabolae Bernhards von Clairvaux*.

Iustitia. Then follows either a continued journey from castle to castle or the siege of the castle by the enemies and its breaching by the forces of Jerusalem.

The scheme is extremely simple and very traditional. Shortly before Bernard's treatment of the theme, it was already elaborated in the allegorical poem *Eupolemius* that chants the battle between the forces of evil under King Cacus and his noble court and the forces of good under King Agatus with his humble retinue of craftsmen and farmers.[102] Bernard comes to the theme again and again. We have small sketches of the story but also fully developed narratives. Variations occur, notably in the choice of vices or virtues, although the liberation always starts with Timor, with fear, for 'fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom',[103] as one of his shorter redactions is entitled, *Sententia* 1.20.[104] In this particular case, it is the prodigal son who is liberated by Timor and Spes. They lead him on the horse of desire through the fields of confidence. Spes precedes the horse; Timor follows. Prudentia comes to meet them and to restrain Timor. But as Fear diminishes, Hope grows in strength and starts to precipitate the horse of desire. That is why Temperantia comes forward to meet them and to hold the horse by the reins.

Each of the virtues is depicted in its action upon the soul. Bernard employs the figurations in order to make the psychological process of human conversion more explicit. His interest lies not in the personifications of virtues and vices themselves but in the dynamics they bring about in the human inner self. In many places, he analyses and studies the connections he might install between the vices on the one hand and between the virtues on the other. For the vices, he ends up with a sort of genealogical descent that describes how one vice is born from the other. As to the virtues, they have no parental links but appear always as a strategic succession of knightly forces, each of them often counterbalancing one of the effects of the vices. Nowhere, however, does he confront them as armies in an open battle, thereby clearly keeping his distance from a true *psychomachia*.

The use of allegorical personifications offers Bernard a way to comprehensibly depict the mental processes that either prevent someone's conversion or induce it. The sermon on conversion applies this technique in an even more

[102] The *Eupolemius* can probably be dated around 1100 and linked to the First Crusade. See Jan Ziolkowski in Sextus Amarcius, *Satires. Eupolemius*, ed. by Pepin and Ziolkowski, pp. xxvi–xxvii. But there is no indication as if Bernard would have known the poem.

[103] Ps. 111. 10 (110. 10 in the Latin numeration): 'Initium Sapientiae timor Domini'. Translation according to the King James' Bible, <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/>.

[104] *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. by Leclercq, vi.2 (1970), 13.

evident way. Biblical reading may convince Reason of the necessity to turn away from a worldly life; as soon as it imposes restrictions upon the body, all its members start to protest and appeal to Will that lies weak and sickened on her bed. Only by a long and difficult discussion, during which Will has a vision on the promised land, can Reason convince the protesting Will of the necessity to restrain the sensual appetites. Once again, the figuration of concepts or forces is no aim in itself but obeys the wish to disclose spiritual dynamics. To Bernard of Clairvaux, it is the story, the mental processes, that call forth the personifications, not the conceptions as entities for themselves.

This distinguishes his allegories from Bernard Silvestris's creation story. The narration is one of the weaker points of the *Cosmographia*. It is less developed and often rather inconsistent. Bernard Silvestris took his departure from the Platonic concepts as becomes clear from the effort he takes to define them in a correct way. The action was given in the text of the *Timaeus* and its commentary. As a narrative, Bernard could follow the frame offered to him and adorn it in a poetically elaborated way.

Bernard of Clairvaux followed a completely different approach. He also looked for the concepts with which he could work. The lists of vices and virtues were offered to him by the writings of the Church Fathers. He tried, however, to bring them into an organic and logical relationship. His focus was on the action as included in the concepts. For that reason, he felt less obliged to define each concept. He was not working with unfamiliar names or terms but with notions that were generally known and understood. He wanted to clarify their action in the human soul by means of an imaginative narrative. As to the captivation and liberation storyline, he seems to have found his inspiration first of all in the growing popularity of knightly stories. There are similarities to the later Arthur stories, but in Bernard they are so completely transposed into the spiritual field that it does not go beyond a faint echo.

For his *Anticlaudianus*, Alan took notice of the poetical approach he could find in the texts of Bernard of Clairvaux. The narrative frame of the first part of the epic was offered by Bernard Silvestris, but the *psychomachia* in the second part shows influence of Bernard of Clairvaux, besides that of Prudentius of course. Alan's presentation of his figurations, however, reminds more of Bernard of Clairvaux than of the *Cosmographia*. Alan avoids the use of unfamiliar philosophical terms. He keeps himself to those that have a long literary and Christian tradition. But, contrary to Bernard of Clairvaux, he does not start from the premise that his personifications will be understandable simply because of this tradition. As a true dialectician, he knows that he has to define them. He does not follow the rather straightforward path that Bernard

Silvestris followed but chooses the indirect approach of Bernard of Clairvaux. He links each figuration to a specific and studied action or description. Instead of a static *etymologia per expostionem* as used by Bernard Silvestris, it allows him to introduce a dynamic one: the names of his personification imply an activity and automatically bring about the development of a narrative.

Conclusion

By combining the allegorical experiments of both Bernard Silvestris and Bernard of Clairvaux, Alan immediately brings the allegorical personification to a literary climax. In Latin, it will not be surpassed anymore. John de Hauvilla's *Architrenius* can be considered an attempt to a written sequel to the *Anticlaudianus*, in a similar way as the latter constituted a sequel to the *Cosmographia*. However, it does not manage to offer a comparable compactness and rather loses itself in pushing Alan's rich but well-thought-out vocabulary to even more extravagant exuberances. It is in the *Roman de la Rose* that the allegorical inspiration as perfected by Alan will find a new and even more influential poetical language and form.

   Yet even there, something will change. As we tried to demonstrate, Alan's epic is deliberately difficult to read. It is the result of an interpretative dynamics that go exactly in the opposite way as we are used to. Alan wants us as readers to reconstruct the poem in the way he constructed it. He wants us to be masters in etymological science and knowledge because otherwise we will never be able to grasp 'the refined subtlety of allegory' (*acutior allegorie subtilitas*) his poem contains. It is not the allegory that must be the goal of the reading but what it implies because only allegory can lead the reader towards 'the symbol of celestial theophany' (*theophanie celestis emblema*) that can only be grasped by 'a purer keenness of the mind' (*puriore mentis acumine*). Only then will the reader be able to reach 'the knowledge of angels thanks to which they can look upon God' that is *theophania*.

   This view of God forms the exact centre of the epic (Books V–VI): it is the pivot of the entire poem, hidden in the light of its poetic splendour. All that comes before and after is related to this centre in exactly the same way as we saw in all the elements of this poem. Indeed, the poem itself is but the effect of etymological dynamics. It leads its own centre by way of *etymologia per derivationem*, *per descriptionem*, *per expositionem*, *per translationem* for God is 'not only one but also unity' ('non solum unus sed etiam monas i.e. unitas').[105] The

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[105] Alan of Lille, '*Regulae caelestis iuris*', I.1, ed. by Häring, p. 124.

poem as much as the universe itself leads us as readers by the inverted way of etymology to this central point of being.

Alan's reader is expected to apply all qualities that he acquired and to be at the level Alan demands him to be. In short, to be, like himself, a *doctor universalis*.

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The Terminal Paronomasia
of Gautier de Coinci

Keith Busby

I f asked to name instances of paronomasia in medieval French, most schol-
ars would probably refer to the so-called 'Grands Rhétoriqueurs', a group of
poets active from roughly the middle of the fifteenth century through the
first decade of the sixteenth.[1] This is not the place for a history of paronomasia
in Old French literature, which would have to be part of a larger enterprise on
how the latter is informed by medieval rhetoric in general.[2] What I will do,
however, is consider some selected examples of paronomasia from the twelfth
and thirteenth centuries in the *langue d'oïl* before taking a longer and more
detailed look at Gautier de Coinci.

Most authors of early Old French texts were clerics, and many had received
the kind of Latin education in the schools which would have sensitized them to
etymology and wordplay in the vernacular. If it can be argued that the 'authors'
of the Old French epic, the *chanson de geste*, were professionals with only a mod-
est education, some of whose work is improvised orally, such is very clearly not
the case for authors of romance and religious/didactic works. The Latin learn-
ing of these poets is evident from the very beginnings of French literature, from
the choice of subject matter (the *romans antiques*, for example[3]) to the applica-

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[1] Gautier has been compared with the *rhétoriqueurs* (somewhat cursorily) by Berthelot, 'De
Gautier de Coinci aux Rhétoriqueurs'.

[2] See especially Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance*.

[3] The three principal texts are the *Roman de Thèbes* (*c.* 1150), adapted from Statius's *Thebaid*,

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tion in the vernacular of the precepts of the arts of poetry. The classical rhetorical tradition to which French vernacular authors were heir from the late twelfth century onwards is essentially that of Cicero's *De inventione*, Quintilian, and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. In addition, certain medieval arts of poetry circulated widely and had a profound influence on literature in French. Principal among these are the *Ars versificatoria* (before 1175) of Matthew of Vendôme, the *Poetria nova* (between 1208 and 1213) and the *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi* (after 1213) of Geoffrey of Vinsauf, the *Ars Poetica* (before 1216) of Gervais of Melkley, the *Parisiana poetria* (*c.* 1240) of John of Garland, and the *Laborintus* (before 1280) of Everard the German.[4] I am not concerned here about whether particular French authors knew particular Latin works, but it is clear that they were imbued with the general rhetorical prescriptions and proscriptions contained in them, including those concerned with paronomasia.

Characterizing precisely the forms of paronomasia employed by medieval French (and other) poets is practically impossible, given the variation in detail from one text to another, not to mention the inclusion or exclusion of specific figures. For the purposes of this chapter, I will use the following working definitions: paronomasia is understood as a general term for wordplay[5] or punning, the most frequently employed forms of which in Old French verse are

1. *annominatio* (forms derived from the same etymological root, also homophones),
2. *polyptoton* (repetition of a word stem with different flexions),
3. *traductio* (application of prefixes or suffixes to a word stem), and
4. *rimes équivoques* (homophonic rhymes which can run to several syllables).

In practice, I will not be categorizing each particular instance (unless it appears to be of especial significance), on the assumption, reasonable or otherwise, that we know a case of paronomasia when we see it.

The best-known *annominatio* in Old French literature is almost certainly the linking of *la mer* (the sea), *amer* (bitter), and *amer* (to love), and the best-known instance that in Thomas of Britain's *Tristan* (1173?). The field of lexemes is expanded in Thomas and elsewhere to include *amor*, *la mort*, and *mordre* (to

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the *Roman d'Eneas* (*c.* 1160), adapted from the *Æneid*, and the *Roman de Troie* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure (*c.* 1165), adapted from Dares and Dictys.

[4] See Faral, *Les arts poétiques* and Kelly, *The Arts of Poetry and Prose*.

[5] I use the term 'wordplay' in a general sense here, *faute de mieux*. It does not necessarily imply the intent to amuse.

bite). These words, of course, have etymons which are phonologically related in Latin, where the association is also frequently made. The verbal play in the *Tristan* passage is thematically appropriate to its context as the bittersweet love of Tristan and Iseut is born at sea, onboard a ship returning from Ireland, when the pair unwittingly drink a love philtre intended for Iseut and Mark. To describe as I have just done the implication of this wordplay does not do justice to the way it is deployed by Thomas or how it evokes a sense of suffering and the inevitability of death. Despite the intensity of numerous affective moments, the overwhelming mood, also created in part by the relentless repetition of the rhyme *amor* : *dolor*, is one of intractable anguish. Among the corpus of Old French Tristan narratives, this is especially the case with Thomas, who makes the effects of the love potion permanent. In the other major verse version, by the poet Béroul, the potion ceases working one day as Tristan is hunting during the lovers' exile in the forest. Thomas is quite clearly a 'clerkly', educated poet, while the extent of Béroul's learning is not evident. Scholars traditionally consider the version of Thomas to be the 'version courtoise', and that of Béroul, the 'version commune'.[6]

The attribution to Thomas of the play on *mer*/*amer* was until recently of necessity secondhand. The versions of both Thomas and Béroul are preserved only in fragments in Old French, and the integral versions have to be reconstructed, mainly from the Middle High German romances of Gottfried von Straßburg (*c*. 1210) and Eilhart von Oberge (*c*. 1170), respectively. Gottfried preserves the *annominatio* in the following passage:

> er [Tristan] sprach suoze unde lise:
> 'ei schœne süeze, saget mir:
> waz wirret iu, waz claget ir?'
> Der Minnen vederspil Isot,
> 'lameir' sprach si, 'daz ist min mot,
> lameir daz swæret mir den muot,
> Lameir ist, daz mir leide tuot.'
> do si lameir so dicke sprach,
> er bedahte unde besach
> anclichen unde cleine
> des selben wortes meine.
> sus begundet sich versinnen,
> lameir daz wære minnen,
> lameir bitter, la meir mer:

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[6] A good introduction is Baumgartner, *Tristan et Yseut*.

der meine der duht in ein her.
er übersach der drier ein
unde vragete von den zwein:
er versweic die minne,
ir beider vogetinne,
ir beider trost, ir beider ger;
mer unde sur beredet er:
'ich wæne' sprach er 'schœne Isot,
mer unde sur sint iuwer not;
iu smecket mer unde wint;
ich wæne, iu diu zwei bitter sint?'
'nein herre, nein! waz saget ir?
der dewederez wirret mir,
mirn smecket weder luft noch se:
lameir al eine tuot mir we.'
do er des wortes zende kam,
minne dar inne vernam,
er sprach vil tougenliche zir:
'entriuwen schœne, als ist ouch mir,
lameir und ir, ir sit min not.' (ll. 11,982–12,015)

['Come now, sweet, lovely woman', he whispered tenderly, 'tell me, what is vexing you, why do you complain so?' '*Lameir* is what distresses me', answered Love's falcon, Isolde, 'it is *lameir* that so oppresses me, *lameir* it is that pains me so'. Hearing her say *lameir* so often he weighed and examined the meaning of the word most narrowly. He then recalled that *l'ameir* meant 'Love', *l'ameir* 'bitter', *la meir* the sea: it seemed to have a host of meanings. He disregarded the one, and asked about the two. Not a word did he say of Love, who was mistress of them both, their common hope and desire. All that he discussed was 'sea' and 'bitter'. 'Surely, fair Isolde, the sharp smack of sea is the cause of your distress. The tang of the sea is too strong for you? It is this you find so bitter?' 'No, my lord, no! What are you saying? Neither of them is troubling me, neither the sea nor its tang is too strong for me. It is *lameir* alone that pains me'. When he got to the bottom of the word and discovered 'Love' inside it, 'Faith, lovely woman', he whispered, 'so it is with me, *lameir* and you are what distress me'.][7]

The Old Norse version translated by one Brother Robert for King Hákon Hákonarson in 1226, known as *Tristramssaga ok Ísöndar*, preserves the episode but not the wordplay.[8]

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[7] Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, ed. by Weber; trans. by Hatto, pp. 199–200.

[8] *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, ch. 46, ed. and trans. by Jorgensen and Hill, pp. 118–23.

Chrétien de Troyes had something of a vexed relationship with the Tristan story. His romances are full of usually derogatory references to the principal characters of the tale and their actions: a knight is said to be braver than Tristan, a damsel's hair is blonder than Iseut's, a lady does not share her body with her husband and her lover (as did Iseut), and so on. The romance of *Cligés* may have been written about 1176, most likely within a few years of Thomas's *Tristan*. For a number of reasons which I cannot go into here, it has been variously called a 'neo-*Tristan*', an 'anti-*Tristan*', and a 'hyper-*Tristan*'.[9] At the beginning of the text, Chrétien lists his *œuvre* to date, including the story 'Del roi Marc et d'Ysalt la blonde' (v. 5).[10] It is curious that he does not mention Tristan in his 'title', for the two names normally associated are those of the pair of lovers. Could this have been a Tristan romance without Tristan? Whatever the case may be, Chrétien knew the story in detail, and may have known the version of Thomas, although that cannot be proven. He does, however, use the *annominatio* on *la mer*, *amer* (both meanings), and *amor*:

> La reïne garde s'an prant
> Et voit l'un et l'autre sovant
> Descolorer et anpalir
> Et sopirer et tressaillir.
> Mes ne set por coi il le font
> Fors que por la mer ou il sont.
> Espoir bien s'an aparceüst
> Se la mers ne la deceüst.
> Mes la mers l'angigne et deçoit
> Si qu'an la mer l'amor ne voit,
> Qu'an la mer sont, et d'amer vient,
> Et s'est amers li max ques tient.
> Et de ces trois ne set blasmer
> La reïne fors que la mer,
> Car li dui le tierz li ancusent,
> Et par le tierz li dui s'escusent,
> Qui del forfet sont antechié. (ll. 541–57)

[The queen noticed this and saw that the two of them often lost colour and turned pale, sighing and trembling, but she did not know why, unless it was because they were at sea. Perhaps she would have noticed if she had not been deceived by the sea. But the sea did trick and deceive her so that she did not notice this love at sea. They

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[9] Cf. Weber, *Chrestien und die Tristandichtung*.
[10] Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligés*, ed. by Luttrell and Gregory.

were at sea, and from love came the bitter pain that gripped them. And of these three things, the queen knew only to blame the sea, for two of them denounced to her the third, which the guilty pair used as an excuse.][11]

The lovers here are Alixandre and Soredamors, the queen, Tantalis (Alixandre's mother). The story of Alixandre and Soredamors is a structural introduction to that of Cligés and Fenice, as that of Tristan's parents, Riwalin and Blanscheflur, precedes that of Tristan and Iseut in Gottfried/Thomas. Gottfried von Straßburg was writing with direct knowledge of Thomas,[12] but whether Chrétien knew his work is moot. If he did not, then we may attribute the *mer/amer/amor/mor* matter to another version or consider it part of the established *matière de Tristan*. It would not have been beyond Chrétien to have invented the figure had it not existed, as his work is informed by what Danièle James-Raoul calls 'la questions des jeux sur le signifiant, centrée sur l'*annominatio*'.[13] Compared with Gautier de Coinci's verbal pyrotechnics, Chrétien's use of the various forms of paronomasia is quite restrained.

In the early 1990s, Michael Benskin was carrying out research in the Cumbria Record Office in Carlisle when he came across some French text on the front and back flyleaves of a cartulary from the Cistercian abbey of Holmcultram.[14] The text proved to be fragments totalling 154 lines from the *Tristan* of Thomas, by a near-miracle preserving the avowal episode, complete with the *annominatio* hitherto known only through Gottfried and Chrétien. The manuscript is Anglo-Norman and dates from the second third of the thirteenth century. The binder's knife has mutilated some of the text, but most of the relevant passage is intact:

> 'Si vus ne fussez, ja ne fusse,
> Ne de l'amer rien ne sëusse.
> Merveille est k'om la mer ne het
> Qui si amer mal en mer set,
> E qui l'anguisse est si amere!
> Si je une foiz fors en ere,
> Ja n'i enteroie, ce quit'.
> Tristran ad noté chescun dit,
> Mes el l'ad issi forsvëé
> Par 'l'amer' que ele ad tant changé

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[11] The translation is mine, as are all others.

[12] 'Thomas von Britanje [...] | der aventiure meister was' (ll. 150–51) ('Thomas of Britain, who was a master-romancer': Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, trans. by Hatto, p. 43).

[13] James-Raoul, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 111.

[14] Benskin, Hunt, and Short, 'Un nouveau fragment du *Tristan* de Thomas'.

> Que ne set si cele dolur
> Ad de la mer ou de l'amur,
> Ou s'el dit 'amer' de 'la mer'
> Ou pur 'l'amur' dïet 'amer'.
> [...]
> 'Car deus mals i put l'en sentir,
> L'un d'amer, l'autre de puïr'.
> Ysolt dit: 'Cel mal que je sent
> Est amer, mes ne put nïent:
> Mon quer angoisse e pres le tient.
> E tel amer de la mer vient:
> Prist puis que je çäenz entray'.
> Tristran respont: 'Autretel ay:
> Ly miens mals est del vostre estrait.
> L'anguisse mon quer amer fait,
> Si ne sent pas le mal amer;
> N'il ne revient pas de la mer,
> Mes d'amer ay ceste dolur,
> E en la mer m'est pris l'amur.
> Assez en ay or dit a sage'. (ll. 39–52, 57–71)

['If you had not been there, nor would I, and I would have known nothing of love/the sea. It is a wonder that anyone who experiences such a bitter pain at sea and whose suffering is so bitter does not hate the sea/love! If ever I were to leave, I would never take to it again, I'm sure'. Tristan took note of every word, but she had so misled him by playing on the word 'amer' that he did not know whether the sea or love was the cause of his affliction, or whether she meant 'to love' when she said 'the sea', or 'love' when she said 'bitter'. [...] 'For one can experience two kinds of sickness in these conditions, one caused by bile (bitter) and the other by nausea'. Iseut said: 'This sickness I feel is bitter but it is not nauseous: it oppresses my heart and holds it tight. And such bitterness/love comes from the sea/love: it started as soon as I came on board'. Tristan replied: 'It's the same with me: my sickness comes from the same place as yours. Sickness makes my heart bitter/disposed to love, yet the sickness does not feel bitter; nor does it come from the sea, but rather from loving is this suffering, and love seized me at sea. The wise person will be able to grasp the meaning of my words'.]

Joseph Bedier's understandable lament that this passage of Thomas was 'à jamais perdu' has fortunately been belied by the discovery in Carlisle.[15]

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[15] Thomas, *Le roman de Tristan*, ed. by Bédier, I, 149–50. See also Benskin, Hunt, and Short, 'Un nouveau fragment du *Tristan* de Thomas', p. 290.

Thomas and Chrétien de Troyes belong to what standard literary histories of medieval French literature consider the classical early period before the end of the twelfth century. The fifty years or so between Chrétien's death (probably in the early 1180s) and the completion of *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame* of Gautier de Coinci witnessed an extraordinary burgeoning of literature of all types in the *langue d'oïl*, characterized, among other things, by a constantly changing awareness of the possibilities of experimentation and innovation. Gautier is not the first to write Marian miracles in French, for he was preceded by an important collection, known as the *Gracial*, written around 1165 by an Anglo-Norman poet by the name of Adgar.[16] The cult of the Virgin, expressed through art, architecture, literature, and theology, was fully developed in France by the time Gautier wrote. Much of his source material was ready-made and may have already been familiar to his audiences in other forms; only the skill of his vernacular expression was lacking. What distinguishes Gautier from Adgar and others are the former's concern with structuring his collections and his extraordinarily complex and skillful versification. Such codicological interest is rare before the fourteenth century (only Adenet le Roi (fl. *c.* 1270–85)[17] springs to mind before the likes of Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart, and Christine de Pizan). As regards techniques of versification, to which Gautier's use of paronomasia is inextricably linked, they became highly complex and formalized in lyric poetry in both the *langue d'oc* and the *langue d'oïl*, but not in narrative.

Gautier has been linked with a contemporary, a recluse called Barthélemy from Molliens-Vidame near Amiens, better known as the Reclus de Moilliens, author of two satirical and moralizing poems, the *Roman de Carité* (*c.* 1224) and the *Miserere* (*c.* 1230). His significance in this context is that both works are written in twelve-line stanzas of octosyllables, rhyming *aabaabbbabba*, the so-called 'strophe d'Hélinand', first found in the *Vers de la mort* (1194–97) of Hélinand de Froidmont.[18] This form almost necessitates the use of *annominatio*, anaphora, assonance, and alliteration to achieve its full potential. I quote a single stanza from the *Roman de Carité* as an example:

> Rois, chil est bons rois ki bien roie
> Les drois et met a droite roie.
> Rois, tu ies rois pour droit roiier;

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[16] Adgar, *Le Gracial*, ed. by Kunstmann. See now Benoit, *Le 'Gracial' d'Adgar*.

[17] See Huot, *From Song to Book*, pp. 39–45.

[18] Renclus de Moiliens, *Li romans de Carité et Miserere*, ed. by Van Hamel; Hélinant de Froidmont, *Les vers de la mort*, ed. by Wulff and Walberg.

> Ki roiera se rois desroie?
> Drois rois est ki son regne aroie
> Et les desrois fait aroiier.
> Car rois ne se puet desroiier
> Sans soi meïsme guerroiier;
> Rois desroiiés son non guerroie.
> Riens ne doit roi atenroiier.
> Rois ki lait droit amenroiier
> O le droit son non amenroie. (XXXI)

[King, a good king is he who orders rights well and puts them in good order. King, you are a king to administer things properly; who will take care of this if a king governs badly? A proper king is one who puts his kingdom in order and makes order from disorder. For a king cannot govern badly unless he is in conflict with himself; a king in disarray makes war on his own name. Nothing must weaken a king. A king who causes right to be diminished weakens his name as well as right.]

Here, the play is on the phoneme *roi* as it occurs in the words for 'king' (*rois*), 'to arrange' (*roiier*), 'order' (*roie*), 'to govern badly' (*desroiier*), 'to put in order' (*aroiier*), 'disorder' (*desrois*), 'to make war' (*guerroiier*), 'to soften up' (*atenroiier*), 'to diminish' (*amenroiier*), and of course, forms of the noun and adjective for 'right' (*drois*, etc.), and throw in *doit* (< *devoir* ('must')) for good measure.[19] The degree of paronomasia in this strophe is highly unusual for the Reclus, for elsewhere it remains much more modest, restricted to a line or two. It does, however, give a foretaste of what we find in Gautier de Coinci.

Exceptionally for French authors of this period, we know enough about Gautier, a Soissons man through and through, if not literally born and bred, to construct a short biography. He was born, probably in the village of Coincy-l'Abbaye, south of Soissons (in the modern department of Aisne, Picardy), in 1177 or 1178. He became a monk at the Benedictine monastery of St Médard in Soissons in 1193, was made Prior of Vic-sur-Aisne in 1215, returning to St Médard, likewise as prior, in 1233. He died in 1236, at the age of fifty-nine. Best known for his collection of *Miracles de Nostre Dame*, which also incorporate some long hagiographical narratives and hymns to the Virgin, Gautier also wrote a life of St Christine; there are other works of doubtful attribution. The hymns are set to music, original, borrowed, *contrafacta*, and plain chant. The Christine life, consisting of 3792 alexandrines, has been dated to 1218,

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[19] Given the involved nature of the paronomasia, my translations are necessarily approximate, sometimes admittedly unsure in places, and cannot reflect the verbal skill of the Old French authors.

well before the completion of the *Miracles*. Both books of the *Miracles*, whose narratives are written in octosyllabic couplets, were likely completed, barring some codicological rearrangement and tinkering, by 1233, possibly as early as 1227. His total attributed *œuvre* amounts to some 39,300 lines of French verse. Gautier took considerable interest in the manuscripts of his own work, some of which were copied on his instructions by his friend Robert de Dive, Prior of St Blaise in Noyon. There are 114 surviving manuscripts of his work (but only two of the Christine life), attesting to the considerable and continuing popularity of the *Miracles* as late as the early sixteenth century. Some of the manuscripts are richly illustrated, while others are more modest run-of-the-mill copies.[20]

The relatively large number of surviving manuscripts of Gautier's *Miracles* may call for comment. Most of what are considered by scholars to be major works of secular verse narrative in Old French are preserved in a handful of copies, usually no more than a dozen, and sometimes in a single exemplar. A few notable exceptions are *Le roman de Troie* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure (*c*. 1165, more than forty manuscripts), *Les vœux du paon* (1312–13, likewise more than forty copies), and *Le roman de la rose* (some three hundred copies at the last count). Benoît's romance is a foundational text of the narrative tradition, the first link between the ancient world and that of medieval France. *Les vœux du paon*, a late avatar of the Alexander story, may owe its popularity to its susceptibility to being grafted onto earlier parts of *Le roman d'Alexandre* or it may stand on its own, where its popularity may be due to the taste for tournaments and pageantry. *Le roman de la rose* is as exceptional with regard to its manuscript transmission as in every other respect. It was the 'must have' text for most of the Middle Ages, in turns courtly, didactic, encyclopaedic, learned, and scurrilous. Its respectability, often cloaked in programmes of attractive miniatures, was more apparent than real. Respectability may in fact be an explanation for the large number of copies of Gautier's *Miracles*. Adgar's Marian collection, *Le gracial*, is transmitted in two manuscripts only, although a text in many ways more akin to the *Miracles*, *La vie des pères* (*c*. 1250) also survives in over forty copies.[21] One of the features of the *Miracles* that doubtless appealed to medieval readers and listeners was the *merveilleux chrétien* — colourful, shocking, gruesome, and occasionally titillating, which provided an alternative to the

[20] Basic information on Gautier can be found in Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, pp. 3–19, to which I am much indebted. See also Collet, *Glossaire et index critiques*, pp. xv–xxxii.

[21] On the *Miracles* and *La vie des péres*, see Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, pp. 187–97. On *La vie des pères* in general, see Tudor, *Tales of Vice and Virtue*.

merveilleux païen of secular romance. This provided cover, in terms of moral justification, for the 'guilty pleasure' of the reading or listening experience. Like *Le roman de la rose*, Gautier's tales provided artists with more than adequate material for the depiction of attractive, sometimes spectacular, scenes. Clearly, Gautier's paronomastic gyrations and the meditations they inspired must also have proven extremely attractive and have contributed to the need for large-scale production of manuscripts.

Most of the biographical information comes from the *Miracles* in which Gautier talks about himself, his friends, and acquaintances quite openly, usually with affection. On the other hand, he is mercilessly vituperative in his hatred of the Jews, money-grubbing clergy, cardinals, lawyers, and hypocrites. Gautier was well connected in monastic, ecclesiastical, and aristocratic milieux in the Soissons area and more generally in north-eastern France. However, he does not appear to have been widely travelled outside of the region, although he may have been to Paris. His culture is exactly what could be expected from a man in his position and of his education. He clearly had access to many written sources but also used eyewitness accounts about supposed miracles which took place in Soissons. Gautier appears to have suffered from migraine.

With such a considerable *œuvre* surviving in such a large corpus of manuscripts, it is shocking to note that until relatively recently, and despite a passable, if imperfect, critical edition of the *Miracles* by V. F. Koenig,[22] Gautier has been ignored by scholars of medieval French, whose attention has been drawn to the apparently more attractive *chanson de geste*, Arthurian romance, *fabliaux*, and courtly lyric. Religious and didactic literature in the French vernacular has generally been the object of neglect for other reasons: some works are enormously long and others thought to be dull in comparison with secular narrative. While this may arguably be true in some cases (depending on taste and expectations), it is patently not so in many others. Saint's lives, miracle tales, exempla, and the versions of Æsopic fable collections (the *Ysopet*) offer some of the most gripping, and sometimes most lurid, narratives in the nascent vernacular. I stress 'nascent' here because the status and function of paronomasia in early French literature depends to a large degree on the prestige of the language and its reception by audiences with varying degrees of linguistic awareness. The rehabilitation of Gautier de Coinci is now indisputably under way: a collection of articles by diverse hands which is henceforth the starting point for further study, the first monograph devoted solely to him since 1978, and some impor-

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[22] Gautier de Coinci, *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame*, ed. by Koenig. On the limitations of Koenig's edition, see Collet, *Glossaire et index critiques*, pp. ix–xi.

tant journal articles, all point to the rehabilitation and acceptance of Gautier in the canon of Old French literature.[23]

It is probably true to say that his use of paronomasia (usually in the form of *annominatio*, *traductio*, and *polyptoton*, with *rimes équivoques*) is the most striking feature of Gautier's versification. While it can be found at any point in his fifty-eight tales, it is most commonly employed as a concluding flourish after the narrative itself. This is not to say that the flourish has no relationship to the preceding miracle. It is so marked a feature, and its execution so virtuosic, that readers and listeners of the *Miracles* would surely have been waiting for each occurrence in high anticipation.

In the earlier *Vie de sainte Cristine*,[24] the use of these figures is relatively restrained and generally confined to rhyming, as if Gautier is getting into his stride, as it were, warming up for the virtuoso performance to come in the *Miracles*. Passages, ranging in length from a couplet to ten lines (the majority being eight), rhyme by virtue of combinations of all the variants of paronomasia mentioned above. There are too many examples to list here, but there are (*sauf erreur*) some seventeen such passages scattered throughout the poem. Also noteworthy are some highly inventive compound, polysyllabic, *rimes équivoques* such as *partiront* : *part iront* (2415–16), *boton* : *bot on* (2421–22), *commença* : *en ença* (2619–20), *delitant* : *de li tant* (3133–34). Other examples are deceptive and show the innovative nature of Gautier's experiments: *vierge* : *venir ge* (1019–20) and *presence* : *en ce* (2051–52) only appear visually to be polysyllabic as *vierge* and the *-sence* of *presence* form only one syllable, while *-ir ge* and *en ce* are two. These are known as *rimes suspendues*.[25]

Towards the beginning of the text, Gautier makes a *pro domo* plea for skilful versification, suggesting that it may not compensate for other failings of an author:

> Seigneurs qui en vos livrez par maistrise metés
> Equivocacions et leonimetés,
> Si autel ne puis faire, ne desprisiez mon livre,

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[23] Krause and Stones, *Gautier de Coinci*; Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*; Collet, *Glossaire et index critiques*; Collet, 'Gautier de Coinci'; Okubo, 'À propos de la *Vie de Sainte Cristine*'; and Okubo, 'La formation de la collection des *Miracles*'.

[24] Gautier de Coinci, *La vie de Sainte Cristine*, ed. by Collet.

[25] See Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, pp. 165–68 for a listing of *rimes suspendues* from the *Miracles*; *rimes équivoques* are listed on pp. 168–76. I have not focused especially on the rhymes in this paper, preferring to concentrate on paronomasia in general.

> Car qui a trover n'a soutil cuer et delivre,
> Se leonimeté par tout veut aconsuirre,
> Molt sovent entrelait ce qu'il devroit ensuirre.
> Nequedent qui l'ensiut sans matere ploier,
> Mont en doit la loenge du dit monteploier,
> Car plus en est la rime plaisant et deliteuse. (ll. 43–51)

[Lords who skillfully place equivocations and leonine rhymes in your books, do not despise mine if I cannot do the same, for he who does not have a keen and free enough heart for poetry and wants to apply leonine rhymes everywhere often abandons his real goal. Nevertheless, if someone pursues this goal without distorting his material, his poem should rise in esteem, for its rhyme is all the more agreeable and delightful.][26]

It is only at the end of the poem that Gautier gives a glimpse of what I have called his 'terminal paronomasia':

> Es kalendes d'aoust, droit au ix^e jor,
> Ala la sainte vierge a l'esjoiant sejor
> Ou ceux qui ci sejornent ja ne sejorneront.
> Tous les jors qui ajornent et qui ajorneront
> Face Dieu a tous ceux joieux jor ajorner
> Qui verront ce saint jor feirier et sejorner
> En l'onur de la virge qui pas ne sejorna.
> Ce fu en ung jeudi que li jors ajorna
> Que sa blanche char tenrre endura l'ajornee
> Par coi est a tous jors en joie sejornee.
>
> Ci fenist ma matiere, et mon livre ci fine.
> La vierge qu'ai amee d'amor vraie et fine
> Et aime et amera tous jors desqu'a la fin
> Depri qu'ele deprit de vrai cuer et de fin
> Celui qui de tout est commancement et fin
> Qu'en ce siecle nous face si parfaiz et si fin
> Qu'a la fin puissons tous finer si finement
> Qu'aions la fine joie qui n'ara finement. (ll. 3775–92)

[On the ninth day of the kalends of August, the holy virgin went to the joyful rest where those who live here will never dwell. May God, every day now and in the

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future, bring a joyful dawn to all those who will see the celebration and live through this holy day in honour of the virgin who will not rest. It was the dawn of a Thursday when her tender white flesh suffered through its way to residence in eternal joy.

Here ends my subject matter, and I conclude my book here. The virgin whom I have loved with true and fine love, and love still and will love always until the end, I pray she beg him who is the beginning and end of all things to make us so spotless and exceptional in this world that at the end we can all come to our close so worthily that we may have the exquisite joy that will know no end.]

Here we see a characteristic mixture of *annominatio*, *polyptoton*, and *traductio*, enhanced by judicious use of alliteration ('esjoiant', 'joieux', 'jeudi', 'joie'; 'face', 'parfaiz'). Nor is the paronomasia restricted to the rhyme-words, as witness the examples of 'amor'/'amer' (ll. 3786–87) and the *polyptoton* on 'deprier' in l. 3788. The sense of a skilful ('fin') ending ('fin') is anticipated by the expression of delight ('joie') in the dawning of day ('ajorner') and the eternal rest ('sejor') enjoyed by Christine.

I clearly cannot examine each case of Gautier's paronomasia in the *Miracles de Nostre Dame*, but a cursory reading reveals innumerable internal cases and over fifty at the end of the individual tales.[27] Gautier's skilful manipulation of etymons, phonology, morphology, and syntax goes beyond the merely dexterous (as might have appeared to be the case in the Christine life) and becomes an integral part of each individual tale, forming a cohesive element of both books of miracles. In final position, the paronomastic *queue*, the *cauda* (the tail of the tale, as it were), underlines the kind of lesson akin to the *moralitas* often found at the conclusion of other forms of exemplum or the Æsopic fable. In these latter, the ending may sometimes seem incidental to the narrative, frequently banal, and occasionally of doubtful relevance. In the case of the *fabliaux*, they may even form part of the joke.[28]

Gautier is acutely aware of the importance and function of the concluding lines of his tales, as well as the effect they can have on his audience, and explains his principles at the end of II Mir 13 ('De l'enfant resuscité qui chantoit *Gaude Maria*'):

[27] Catalogued by Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, pp. 39–47.

[28] I would disagree with Kunstmann, who writes at the end of his technical analysis of *annominatio* that 'Pour ma part, cette figure constitue *essentiellement* [my italics] un ornement, d'ordre morphologique, syntaxique et sémantique, un exercice, un tour de virtuosité, une acrobatie verbale': 'L'*annominatio* chez Gautier', p. 112.

> S'un petit ai ici bordé,
> Ne vos griet pas, pour amor Dé.
> Aucune foys a la parclose
> De ces myracles di tel chose
> Sour aucun mot ou je m'enbat
> Ou je meïsmes mout m'esbat
> Et dont refais a la foys rire
> Cialz que plorer ai fait au lire.
> De ces myracles i a telz
> Qui tant sont doz et tant piteuz
> Que pluisors genz les cuers apitent
> Et a plourer auquans escitent.
> Cele que vois tant recitant
> Par sa douceur noz escit tant
> Qu'ausi soyomes escité
> Con furent cil de la cité
> Ou le clerçon resuscita.
> A s'amor toz les escita
> Et noz ausi toz i escit.
> Or as autres, finez est cit. (ll. 733–52)

[If I have jested a little here, do not be upset, for the love of God. Sometimes at the end of these miracles I say some word which I seize upon with relish in such a way that makes those laugh whom I had made cry when they were reading (the text). Among these miracles are some so sweet and sad that they move the hearts of some and incite others to tears. She about whom I recite so much moves us by her sweetness that we are affected as were those in the city where the young student came back to life. She inspired them all with her love as she does all of us. Now on to the next tales, for this one is finished.]

The play is on the phoneme *cit* as it appears in forms of the verbs 'esciter', 'reciter', and 'resusciter' (*traductio* and *polyptoton*), and the unusual form of the demonstrative pronoun, 'cit'; *escité:cité* is a *rime équivoque*. Gautier may be suggesting here that his miracles can be read silently by individuals or aloud to a listening audience, and that audience response can in part be conditioned by delivery.[29] Even if this is not the case, the performance is imagined and readers still transition from a moving tale to what might seem to be the light relief of an entertaining terminal paronomasia. But the paronomasia is not just a superficial display of verbal pyrotechnics, for it takes us back to the core of the tale

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[29] Cf. I Pr 2, ll. 55–56: 'Et qui por m'ame prïeront | Quant le liront et oront lire' (And who will pray for my soul when they read it or hear it read).

and its meaning, Gautier's devotion to Mary, and the objects of his satire.[30] The diversity in the types of manuscripts in which the *Miracles* are preserved, illuminated and non-illuminated, luxurious and modest, argues in favour of both aural and visual reception.

Tony Hunt has recently studied Gautier's versification, including his use of the various forms of paronomasia, and my own commentary here is little more than a selective supplement to Hunt's meticulous analysis. Many of the paronomastic passages at the end of the tales underscore one or more central themes of the preceding narrative and can also serve as a link, anticipating the next miracle. Hunt has also shown that prologues and epilogues structure the two books of *Miracles* like bookends, and I would add that they also serve to alert readers or listeners to the kind of techniques Gautier is about to employ or to consolidate and corroborate what they have just witnessed. The first of the two prologues, for example, opens with a series of paronomastic passages, on *lit* (ll. 24–32), *puis* (39–50), and the already classic *amer/amor/mordre*, but replacing *mer* ('sea') with *mere* ('mother'), the reason for which is clear: there is no direct maritime context, and Mary is the mother of Christ. It might be argued that Gautier missed here the opportunity to work in a play on *stella maris*:[31]

> Petit devons Evain amer
> Quant ele morst le mors amer
> Qu'achatons tant amerement.
> Cil qui l'apele mere ment,
> Car marastre fu mout amere.
> Mais la pucele est nostre mere,
> Qui en ses flans le roi porta
> Qui en morant mort amorta
> Qu'Eve a nous mordre avoit amorse
> Par la pome qu'ele eut demorse.
> Del mors Evain vint la morsure
> Dont nous eüst tos mors mors sure
> Se Diex ne fust, qui par sa mort
> De nous mordre la desamort.
> Eve est amere et enfielee,
> Marie douce et enmielee. (I Pr 1, ll. 135–50)

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[30] See Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, pp. 123–56, for the ways in which the play on words articulates Gautier's satire and the expression of his moral doctrine. For an earlier study, see Lommatzsch, *Gautier de Coincy als Satiriker*.

[31] But see I Mir 35 ('D'un abbé qui nagoit en mer'), l. 203: 'Dame qui de mer iez estoile', which leads into a ten-line *cauda* on *port* ('to carry', 'port') and *deporter* ('to enjoy oneself').

[We should have little love for Eve when she bit the bitter bite for which we pay so bitterly. He who calls her mother lies, for this stepmother was extremely bitter. But the maiden who bore the king within her body is our mother, the king who by his dying tempted that same death with which Eve had attempted to bite us by means of the apple she had bitten. From Eve's bite came the bruise by which a certain death would have killed us all, had it not been for God, who by his own death prevented it from biting us. Eve is bitter and full of bile, Marie, sweet and honeyed.]

The second prologue ends in a disavowal of secular song (which we can also take to include secular narrative and with which Gautier is quite familar, as we shall see), playing on the different etymologies of the *chant* phoneme in French (an *annominatio*, including a *traductio* on verbs for 'to sing', 'to sing descant', and 'to enchant'):

> Or veil atant traire ma lire
> Et atemprer veil ma vïele,
> Se chanterai de la pucele
> Dont li prophete tant chanterent
> Et qui mil ans ains l'anoncerent
> Qu'engenree ne nee fust
> Ne cloufichiés fust Diex en fust.
> Qui que vos chant chançons polies
> De risees et de folies,
> Je ne veil pas chanter tex chans,
> Car trop i a pleurs et deschans:
> L'ame sovent pleure et deschante
> Dou chanteür qui tex chans chante.
> Qui l'anemi velt enchanter
> De la grant dame doit chanter
> Dont jor et nuit li angle chantent.
> Dyable endorment et enchantent
> Tout cil qui chantent sen doz chant.
> Or escoutez comment j'en chant. (I Pr 2, ll. 56–74)

[Now I want to take out my lyre and tune my 'vielle', and I will sing of the maiden of whom the prophets sang so much and who announced a thousand years ago that she was neither conceived nor born, nor was God crucified on wood. Whoever sings to you fine songs of jests and foolishness, I do not wish to sing such songs, for there are too many tears and lamentations: the soul of the singer of such songs often weeps and laments. Whoever wishes to bewitch the Devil must sing of the great lady of whom the angels sing day and night. All those who sing her sweet song send Devils to sleep and put them under a spell. Now listen to how I sing of her.]

Gautier sings of the Virgin as did the prophets before him and as do the angels still; and those who sing her praises can ensorcell demons, as Gautier proposes to do. This leads appropriately into I Ch 3, the opening two stanzas of which continue the same *annominatio* on *chant*. I Ch 3 is the first of seven Marian hymns which lead into I Mir 10, 'Comment Theophilus vint a penitance', which itself begins with a twelve-line paronomasia on *port* (in words for 'to disport', 'to carry', 'port').[32] Gautier enjoys rhyming miracles to provide entertainment for those who bear honour to the Virgin, the bridge and port leading to paradise, who herself bore him who brings all joy. Continuing the musical theme, I Mir 10 concludes with a long paronomasia (ll. 2077–92) on *corde*, stressing the harmony of God's turning discord into concord with his mercy (miseri*cord*), breaking the cords binding sinner to Devil, of Theophilus reconciling ('racorder') with the Virgin, the whole underpinned by the sense of 'recorder' as 'to remember'. Wholeness and memory are also the semantic fields of the final paronomasia of I Mir 11 (ll. 2343–56), the life of Ildefonsus of Toledo ('D'un archevesque qui fu a Tholete'), which turns on the homophony of two etymological roots, namely *menbre* as 'member', 'limb', and the etymon *menbre* as in the verb 'to remember'. *Menbrer* in Old French can also mean 'to take fleshly form'. The Virgin's form is beautiful and should be commemorated; if Gautier does not succeed, his tongue should be ripped out; God took human form in the Virgin; hell will dismember us if we do not remember God's kindness. This whole passage is a typical combination of *annominatio*, *polyptoton*, and *traductio*. It was preceded by eight lines (ll. 2335–42) on *pareil*, underlining that the Virgin is without peer.[33]

  Double paronomasia appears to be characteristic of Gautier. In I Mir 22 ('Dou jovencel que li dyables ravi, mais il ne le pot tenir contre Nostre Dame'), he concludes with ten lines on *amer*/*amor* which overlap with a ten-line *annominatio* on *faus*, including five *rimes équivoques*:

> Nostre Dame Sainte Marie
> De li amer si l'enflamma
> Que si tres sadement l'ama

Que toute amors li seut l'amer
Por li tres sadement amer.
La douce dame glorïeuse
A amer est si savoureuse
Que qui un peu i met son cuer
Humaine amor jete luez interminable.
Humaine amors ses amis fausse,
Mais Nostre Dame n'est pas fausse.
Mauvais amans et faus seroit
Cil qui d'amors la fausseroit,
Car ja nului ne faussera.
Cil qui la fausse faus sera.
Devant Dieu ou ciel faus seront
Qui l'ont faussee et fausseront.
Or doinst Diex nos ne la faussomes
Et bons nos face se faus somes. (ll. 458–76)

[Our Lady, Holy Mary, incited him to love her so sweetly that love entire inclined to the pain necessary to love her very sweetly. Loving the sweet glorious lady is so exquisite that whoever puts his heart a little in it straightaway discards human love forever. Human love betrays its lovers, but Our Lady is not unfaithful. He would be a bad and false lover who betrayed her in love, for she will betray no one. He who betrays her will be false. Those who have betrayed and will betray her will be found false before God in heaven. So may God not let us betray her, and let him be good to us if we are faithless.]

In the tale, the couple had broken their vow of chastity (*faus amor*), leading to the birth of the child abducted by the Devil.[34] Such a device is not exclusively employed at the end of a tale. For example, in I Mir 44 ('Comment sainte Leochade fu perdue'), ll. 346–71 contain a rather odd culinary double play on *piu* ('pious') and *piument* ('piously', 'spice'), *aloser* ('to praise') and *alose* ('shad'), again incorporating numerous *rimes équivoques*. The passage is introduced by what must already in Gautier's time been a well-established play on 'Pentecouste. | C'est une feste qui mout couste' (ll. 349–50).[35]

The concluding passage of I Mir 42 ('D'un moigne qui fu ou fleuve'), the central theme of which is *luxure*, underlines the unclean nature of the sin. A struggle between the Devil and the Virgin over the soul of a monk who has

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[34] Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, p. 141.

[35] The best known example is from the beginning of Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*, ed. by Foerster, ll. 5–6: 'A cele feste qui tant coste, | Qu'an doit clamer la pantecoste'. Cf. Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, pp. 151–52.

succumbed to female charms is followed by the narrator's discussion of good and bad women. The moral explains that the sinner flounders (*borbeter*) in mud (*boe*, *borbe*) and in the quagmire (*borbier*) as the duck paddles interminably in the same pit.[36] II Mir 18 ('Dou gïuis qui reçut l'ymage Dieu en wages') tells how a Jewish moneylender tries in vain to swindle one of his debtors, the moral of the tale being that only God rewards the virtuous with gifts that are enduring. The final paronomasia (ll. 579–86) appropriately plays on substantival and verbal derivatives of *don* ('gift') and *guerredon* ('reward', an etymologically bilingual *traductio*, combining the Germanic iterative prefix *wider* and the Latin *donum*).[37] The theme of lending, spending, and conducting business is picked up at the beginning of the following miracle, II Mir 19 ('De deux freres, Perron et Estene'), a satire on the legal profession (ll. 27–28 repeats the rhyme *guerredon*:*don*). Fraudulent and dishonest lawyers learn to ply their trade in Bologna, whence the resonance of the concluding lines, playing on the syllable *boule* (as in *bouler*, 'to deceive', 'to boil'; *tribouleres*, 'troublemaker'):

> Mar i font or les males oevres,
> Mar i mainjüent povre gent
> Et mar leur boulent leur argent!
> Plaideür vont le mont boulant.
> Il n'est nus hom qui leur boule ant
> Que maugré sien ne soit bouleres
> Et plaideriax et tribouleres.
> En la chaudiere ou Judas bout
> Jeté seront trestuit debout.
> Pour ce que tout guillent et boulent,
> En enfer ardent tuit et boulent. (ll. 464–74)

[It's a disgrace that they do wicked deeds, devour poor people and defraud them of their money! Lawyers defraud the whole world. No man can match them in deception unless he become against his better nature a cheat, lawyer, or rogue. In the cauldron where Judas boils they will all be thrown feet first. Because they trick and defraud, they will all burn and boil in hell.]

The last line is especially effective with its climax on 'boulent' — all lawyers will burn and boil in hell.[38]

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[36] See Clark, 'Gautier's Wordplay as Devotional Ecstasy', p. 117.

[37] I am not suggesting that any medieval reader or listener, perhaps not even Gautier, would have been aware of the bilingual etymology of *guerredon*.

[38] Cf. also I Mir 11 (the Ildefonsus life), ll. 1107–46, for another play on *boule*, focusing

The arrangement of tales within the collection is clearly of paramount importance to Gautier. As an example, we may take the pair of I Mir 12 and I Mir 13, both of which deal with Jews. The first is the well-known story of a Jewish boy who converts to Christianity and who fails to burn when his father throws him in a furnace ('De l'enfant a un gïu qui se crestïena', known from the contemporary *Vie des pères* as 'Juïtel').[39] The paronomasia of the final twelve lines (ll. 131–42) works through the usual *annominatio*, *traductio*, and *polyptoton* on *dur*, underlining the irremediable hardness of the Jews.[40] The second is 'De la tavlete en coi l'ymage de la mere Dieu estoit painte' in which a cruel Jew throws an image of the Virgin into the privy and is struck down with epilepsy and promptly carted off, body and soul, to hell by demons. When the Christian owner retrieves the image and cleans it, it secretes large quantities of holy oil and becomes an object of pilgrimage. An image of Mary had also been the inspiration for the young Jew's conversion in the preceding miracle. The link between the two stories is nicely consolidated by the conclusion of I Mir 13, the paronomastic phoneme of which is *fon*, one sense of which is 'melt', and which contrasts with the hardness of *dur*; *confondre* can mean 'to condemn' or 'to destroy', *enfondre*, 'to soak' or 'to freeze'. The passage is worth quoting in full:

> Come chaon frïent et fondent
> Quant son saint nom tot ne confondent.
> Por ce les a si confondus,
> Les frïeuleus, les enfondus,
> Que toz li mondes les confont.
> Por ce qu'il li fisent et font
> Et qu'il n'ont foi ne fondement,
> Les feri Diex el fondement;
> Por ce sont il tout enfondu,
> Flestre et fronci, fade et fondu. (ll. 83–92)

[They fry and melt like bits of pork when they do not completely condemn her holy name. For this reason it has destroyed the frozen and the drenched so that the entire world condemns them. Because of what they did and do to him, and because they have neither faith nor foundation, God smacks them in the backside; this is why they are completely soaked, flabby and wrinkled, weak and destroyed.]

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on the enmity between the universities of Paris and Bologna, See Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, pp. 128–29.

[39] *La vie des pères*, ed. by Lecoy, pp. 14–26.

[40] For other passages on *dur*, see the *caudæ* to I Mir 31, I Mir 43, and I Mir 44, ll. 260–70.

In addition to the usual *traductio* and *polyptoton*, Gautier's sense of humour allows him to use what appears to be an identical rhyme in ll. 89–90. The rhyme-words are both from Latin *fundamentum*, but the sense is different: the first means 'foundation' (basis of faith), the second, 'anus' (a quite common use of *fundamentum* in Latin). Like the unrepentant Jews in I Mir 12, those of I Mir 13 are also cooking, here in lard, contrasted implicitly with the holy oil secreted from the image of the Virgin.

On occasions, Gautier uses paronomasia at both the beginning and end of individual tales in order to create a kind of *mise en abîme* of the bookend structure of the two books of his collection. Indeed, the first tale proper, I Mir 10 (the Theophilus poem) opens with twelve lines on *port* (ll. 1–12) and ends with sixteen lines on *corde*. Lines 9–16 of I Mir 16 ('De un moigne que Nostre Dame delivra dou Dyable') play on *techie* ('stain') and *pechié* ('sin'), while the poem concludes with fifteen lines (ll. 184–98) on *livre* ('book' and 'render'), *ivre* ('drunk'), and *delivre* ('free'), both underscoring the theme of the miracle. The end of I Mir 19 ('Dou riche et de la veve fame') has a long wordplay of fifteen lines on *mordre* ('to bite'; ll. 558–72) which picks up on an earlier *traductio* on *mordre* and *mort*.[41] Such instances, however, are relatively rare. More common, almost universal, is the opening which includes several pairs of *rimes équivoques* and *rimes suspendues* before passing into the main narrative and heading towards the almost inevitable terminal paronomasia.

Almost inevitable, because there are two sequences (I Mir 38–39 and II Mir 14–17) where there is no wordplay of any kind at the end of the earlier tales, that is, I Mir 38 and II Mir 14–16. I Mir 38 ('De l'orison Nostre Dame') has a final passage introducing I Mir 39 ('De cele meïsme orison'), on essentially the same subject, but without any of the paronomastic devices so common in Gautier: 'Por ce que mielz vos doie plaire, | Encor vos en volrai retraire, | Se j'ai loisir et se je puis, | Un biau myracle que j'en truis' (ll. 343–46) (Because I should please you more, I want to relate to you, if time and ability permit, a fine miracle I have found). The four tales of II Mir 14–17 all deal with the translation to England by a certain Bueve of the portable altar from the old church of Laon and are clearly presented as a whole by Gautier. The 'fiertre' (< *feretrum*) or 'filatere' (< *phylacterion*) is first taken to Arras, where it restores the sight of the goldsmith who had made it ('Comment li horsfevres fu renluminez') and then to England, where it effects miracles in Dover, Canterbury, Christchurch, London, and Winchester. II Mir 15 ('Des marcheans qui offrirent Nostre Dame deniers et puis li tolrent') is a satire on greedy merchants, while II Mir 16–17

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[41] Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, p. 144.

('Comment la fiertre fu boutee hors de l'eglyse' and 'Comment li moustiers et toute la vile fu ars par un dragon') are dominated by Gautier's anglophobia, directed at the clergy and again at merchants. I Mir 17 ends with a complex passage of thirteen lines (ll. 256–68), combining plays on *amer* and *port* with a ten-line rhyming *polyptoton* and *traductio* on *duire* (< *ducere*) and derivatives such as *conduire* ('to conduct', 'to lead') and *esduis* ('blind'), underlining the movement of the altar and the blindness of those who refuse to love the Virgin. Those who do love her will be led to a safe haven.[42] This mini sequence is perfectly structured within the framework of the collection: I Mir 14 is more of an introduction than a narrative, and I Mir 17 leads us paronomastically to heaven's port, concluding with an 'Amen'.[43]

Gautier has favourite roots, not hesitating to recycle when appropriate. Structurally and stylistically, this is generally unimportant as the repetitions are sufficiently far apart within the bounds of the two books of miracles that they are hardly noticeable if the tales are read or performed in sequence.[44] Gautier's concern with the structure of his collections suggests that he intended this to be at least one possible form of reception. However, given the practicalities of both silent and aural reception, it is equally likely that some of the shorter tales were read in sequences of two or three, and even that some of the longer pieces were read in several sessions. Favourite stories may have been read repeatedly so that readers and audiences became familiar with detail and eagerly anticipated various aspects of them. I give below just a few examples among the many recurring phonemes and roots used more than once by Gautier in his longer wordplays:

- *chant* (I Pr 1, I Mir 14, II Mir 13)
- *corde* (*Christine* (two occurrences), I Mir 10, II Mir 21)
- *dur* (*Christine*, I Mir 11, I Mir 12, I Mir 31, I Mir 43)
- *fin* (*Christine*, II Mir 9, II Mir 22, II Dout 34)
- *mordre*/*mort* (I Pr 1, I Mir 19, II Dout 34)
- *ploie* (*Christine*, I Mir 15, II Mir 31)
- *port* (I Mir 10, I Mir 28, I Mir 35, II Pr 1, II Mir 32)

[42] Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, p. 142.

[43] Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, pp. 43, 45, and Clark, 'Gautier's Wordplay as Devotional Ecstasy', pp. 114–15.

[44] This does not necessarily negate Hunt's observation that 'there are elements of the lexus which lend themselves to *annominatio*, even at the risk of a certain facility' (*Miraculous Rhymes*, p. 144).

We have already seen how several of these articulate principal themes and concerns of the miracles in which they are employed. They occur at countless locations in short passages and at the rhyme.

In some of the longer tales, Gautier creates the space in which to deploy paronomasia at a number of pertinent locations, usually to interrupt and slow down the narrative by causing the reader or listener to pause and reflect on a theme relevant to the miracle as a whole. I will examine briefly only the case of I Mir 11, the life of Ildefonsus of Toledo.[45] There are eight significant paronomastic passages of over eight lines before the conclusion discussed above:

> ll. 373–82 on *sac*/*sache*: An anti-Semitic tirade playing on *sac* ('money bag'), *sachier* ('to pull'), *ensachier* ('to put in a bag'), and forms of the present participle and subjunctive of *savoir*. Criticism of the Jews is also expressed by means of a *traductio* on *dur* in ll. 241–43.

> ll. 807–24 on *bec*, *bestorner*, and *mol*, preceded (ll. 805–06) by the rhyme *sachié* : *ensachié*: A diatribe on the greed of priests dependent on *bec* ('beak', 'nose'), *bestorner* ('to corrupt', 'to turn upside-down'), *bechier* ('to peck'), *bé* (musical term), and *baer* ('to gape'); *mol* ('soft', 'weak'), *mole* ('rock'), including many *rimes équivoques*, amongst which are the musical rhymes *be dur:be dur* and *abé mol:B mol*.[46]

> ll. 891–907 on *chardon*: Criticizing the avarice of cardinals, playing on derivatives of *chardon* ('thistle'), *chardonal* ('cardinal'), *eschars* ('avaricious'), *eschardoner* ('to sting'), and *doner* ('to give'), leading into another play on *poin* ('point', 'fist') and *poignies* ('fistful').[47]

> ll. 1130–44 on *boule* and *menui*: Clerics go to Bologna to become lawyers. Gautier plays on the city name and derivatives of *boule* ('deception') and *bouler* ('to deceive') before a couplet rhyming *craisse* : *encraisse* ('fat', 'grease', 'to become fat') leads into a play on *amenuisier* ('to diminish'), *menuisier* ('artisan goldsmith'), and *menuise* ('minnow', 'fry'). Bologna has a nefarious influence on Paris.[48]

> ll. 1519–50 on *begin* and *noie*: A long and complicated passage on hypocrites and heretics, in which Gautier discusses the etymology of *begin* ('hypocrite', 'beguine')

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[45] Discussed at length by Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, pp. 123–35.

[46] The musical rhymes are hardly surprising, given Gautier's musical knowledge and activities. His musicality and its significance for the *Miracles* are discussed by Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, ch. 3, pp. 75–121.

[47] See Clark, 'Gautier's Wordplay as Devotional Ecstasy', pp. 116–17.

[48] Cf. also II Mir 19, discussed above.

< Lat. *benignitate* or *begon* and *begart* ('hypocrite' and 'manure');[49] the passage ends with a play on the phoneme *noie*, as in the verb *noier* ('to drown'), *renoié* ('traitor'), and the place-name *Noion* (modern Noyon < *Noviomagus*). The *begins* and *pappelards* (cf. l. 1380, 'pappe lart' = 'devours bacon') will cause Noyon and the surrounding region to be inundated 'Se toz en Oyse nes noion' (Unless we drown them all in the river Oise, l. 1546).

ll. 1600–08 on *pance*: More piscatorial rhymes (*angille* : *Evangille* and *saumon*: *Salemon*, ll. 1581–84) lead up to nine lines on the gluttony of the *pappelards* playing on *pance* ('belly'), *espancier* ('to disembowel', reflexive 'to bust a gut'), *enpancier* ('to fill one's belly'), and the fictional saint *Pançart*, patron saint of gluttons.[50]

ll. 1622–36 on *char*: Also concerning the gluttony of hypocrites, playing on the different meanings of *char* ('flesh', 'meat', and 'cart'), *(en)charchier* ('to load'), *eschar* ('mockery'), and *escharnir* ('to mock'), ending in a passage of two *rimes équivoques*: 'L'ame la char heit com charoigne. | N'est nus sages qui sa char oigne. | Prelat leur ames escharnissent | Quant del delit de la char n'issent' (ll. 1633–36) (The soul hates flesh as a corpse. He is not wise who greases his cart. Priests mock their souls when they do not escape the pleasures of the flesh).

ll. 2177–93 on *mande*: A passage on Our Lady, playing on derivatives such as *mander* ('to convoke', 'to send'), *mandé* ('alms'; cf. English 'maundy'), *commander* ('to commend', 'to command'), *commant* ('subject'), *demander*.

This is Gautier at his best and most virtuosic. Hunt even considers the *char* passage (ll. 1622–36) as 'so dense as to reach the point of cacophony'.[51]

Gautier's oeuvre is replete with references to secular literature and its transmission by minstrels. Much of II Pr 1, for example, is devoted to contrasting edifying religious works with the kind of texts audiences prefer:

> chevalier, prince et haut homme
> Aimment mais mielz atruperies,
> Risees, gas et truferies,
> Sons et sonnés, fables et faintes
> Que vies de sains ne de saintes.
> Longues fables et sermons cors
> Demandent mais aval ces cors.

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[49] Although Gautier shows occasional interest in etymology, it is in its modern sense generally conspicuous by its absence. I raise the issue, following Hunt, in my conclusion.

[50] On St Pançart in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, see Merceron, *Dictionnaire des saints imaginaires et facétieux*, pp. 112–15. I Mir 11, l. 1604 is the first attestation.

[51] Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, p. 133. Cf. also Kunstmann, 'L'*annominatio* chez Gautier', p. 107, who writes that 'l'*annominatio* n'est pas limitée aux mots à la rime, mais sature tout le passage'.

> Larges mençoignes, bordes amples
> Aimment mais miels que les essamples
> Ne les bons dis de l'Escriture. (ll. 144–53)

[knights, princes, and nobles prefer lies, gags, tricks, and japes, tunes and short poems, fables and fiction, to the lives of saints. They demand long fables and short sermons when at court. They like great lies and tall tales more than exempla or the edifying sayings of scripture.]

There is no doubting Gautier's familiarity with the literature he sometimes claims to disdain, for he mentions numerous genres as well as specific texts and characters from them. *Le roman de Renart* is particularly singled out (II Pr 1, ll. 48–50; II Mir 20, l. 264; II Mir 27, ll. 503–10), as is the *chanson de geste* (I Mir 39, ll. 90–91; I Mir 41, ll. 370–75; I Mir 44, ll. 513–18; II Mir 20, ll. 453–62; II Mir 30, ll. 598–603; II Epi 34, ll. 1920–23). Other references are to the Troy story (I Mir 44, ll. 298–99), Tristan and Iseut and Pyramus and Thisbe (II Mir 9, ll. 298–303, including a standard secular play on *triste* and *Tristran*, ll. 299–300). Latin literature of the *auctores* is not above criticism as Gautier disavows Lucan, Juvenal, Virgil (II Pr 1, ll. 67–70), although he quotes Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* on women's chastity with apparent approval (II Ch 9, ll. 1335–37). Additionally, Gautier's wide use of secular themes, style, and genres situates him firmly at the centre of the Old French literary tradition. His bookishness, sacred and secular, is evident in every line, and several passages illustrate the importance for Gautier of the written word.

Not all of these allusions are contemptuous, and in fact, most of them are relatively neutral insofar as they use characters from the world of romance and epic as terms of comparison. If the satire of the *Roman de Renart* is judged most harshly as being irreverent, one might conclude that since Gautier is a merciless and irreverent satirist, it takes one to know one. His concern is not so much with secular literature itself, but rather with the inclination of audiences to prefer it to the kind of edifying material he is himself presenting in the *Miracles*. In this light, the deployment of the verbal skills exemplified by his paronomasia, terminal and otherwise, is intended to deflect audience and reader attention away from courtly literature and direct it towards genres such as those in which he works. The lack of an outright condemnation of epic and romance suggests that Gautier's aim is to restore a balance in reading and listening habits among those not literate in Latin.

Gautier's complex and ambiguous relationship with secular literature is further exemplified by his harsh attacks on minstrels and *jongleurs*, the performers of the vernacular secular texts to which he alludes. In I Mir 38 ('De l'orison Nostre Dame'), for example, the Devil insinuates himself as a confidant into

the house of a wealthy charitable man. A visiting bishop recognizes the demon for what he is and asks the host:

> — De si fait menestrel a faire
> Qu'avez, fait l'evesques, biaus hostez?
> — Sire, fait il, en toutes costes
> M'aiu de lui, car ne sai rien
> Qu'il ne saiche faire trop bien.
> Ainc nus vallez ne fu mais telz.
> Il est de tout bons menestrelz:
> Il seit peschier, il seit chacier;
> Il seit trop bien gens solacier;
> Il seit chansons, sonés et fables;
> Il sait d'eschez, il seit d'estables,
> Il seit d'arbalestre et d'arçons.
> Ainc ne veïstes nul garçon
> Ne nul vallet de tel affaire.
> — Encor seit il assez plus faire.
> Fait l'evesques, que vous ne dites. (ll. 232–47)

['What is your business with such a minstrel, fair host?' asked the bishop. 'Sire', he said, 'he is helpful to me in all matters, for I know nothing that he cannot do well. No one ever saw such a lad. He is the best minstrel of all: he knows how to fish and to hunt; he knows how to comfort people; he knows songs, poems, and fables; he knows chess and tables; he know about arrows and bows. You never saw so talented a boy or lad.' 'He knows how to do much more than you have said', said the bishop.]

Here, the bishop uses the term 'menestrel' as a general pejorative while the host uses it both literally and in an extended sense resembling 'prodigy'. Other uses of the word as a pejorative are scattered throughout the *Miracles*: in I Mir 15 ('Dou clerc mort en cui bouche on trova la flor'), the assembled clergy refuse to bury a deceased colleague in their cemetery, saying that 'telz menestrelz | En leur aitre ja ne giroit' (ll. 36–37) (such a minstrel would never lie in their cemetery), while in I Mir 42 ('D'un moigne qui fu ou fleuve'), 'tel menestrel' (l. 243) clearly means something like 'such a good-for-nothing', and in II Mir 27 ('D'une fame qui fu garie a Arras'), l. 535, it is in apposition to another pejorative: 'telz larrons, telz menestreuz' (such a thief/rogue, such a minstrel).[52]

Gautier sometimes employs the terms 'menestrel' and 'jougelour' in the same sense, with no distinction. In II Mir 21 ('Dou cierge qui descendi au jou-

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[52] Cf. also II Mir 13 ('De l'enfant resuscité qui chantoit *Gaude Maria*'), l. 701. The pejorative use of *menestrel* has also been noted by Foehr-Janssens, 'Histoire poétique du péché', p. 225.

gleour'), the figure of Pierre de Sygelar is favoured by the Virgin with the gift
of a candle during a pilgrimage to Rocamadour. A jealous monk attributes the
appearance of the candle to necromancy: 'Onques mais, ce dist, en sa vie | Ne
vit si grant enchanterie. | Le menestrel, le jougleor | Claimme souvent enchan-
teor' (ll. 99–102) ('Never', he said, 'did I see such sorcery. The enchanter often
claims minstrels and jongleurs as his own'.). This tale, which ends appropriately
with a fourteen-line passage playing again on derivatives of *corde* ('string') and
a *traductio* on *corde*, including *acorder* ('to tune') and *descorde* ('discord'), pre-
sents what can be seen as a figure of Gautier himself as the minstrel of Our
Lady, as opposed to the frivolous types he frequently denigrates. The figure had
already been introduced, of course, at the end of I Mir 11 (the Ildefonsus life),
where Gautier (or his narrator) maintains through an anaphora that he does
not write poetry ('Je ne truis pas …', ll. 2322, 2327; 'Je ne truis mie …', l. 2333)
for material gain, but only for the love of Mary: 'Car troveres ne sui je mie |
Fors de ma dame et de m'amie, | Ne menestrex ne sui je pas' (ll. 2315–17) (For
I am not a *trouvère*, except for my lady and my beloved, nor am I a minstrel).[53]
Both Pierre de Sygelar and Ildefonsus can be seen as embodying the ideals of
Gautier de Coinci, the *jongleur* and minstrel of Our Lady, formed in the image
of King David the psalmist.[54]

Gautier's verbal dexterity, including the various forms of paronomasia
which he so deftly deploys, is surely the most striking feature of the versification
of the *Miracles*. It is his skill with language that both sings the praises and earns
him the favours of Mary, and, together with his choice of subject matter, distin-
guishes him from the secular vernacular poets whose productions and motiva-
tions he derides. Yet given his indebtedness to those authors (which could be
the subject of a whole monograph), it is difficult not to suspect that he has a
grudging admiration for them. If he feels obliged to use the Ciceronian *capta-
tio benevolentiæ ab adversariorum persona* (*De inventione*, i, 16), it is precisely
to their success in the last quarter of the twelfth century and first quarter of
the thirteenth that Gautier responds with such gusto and faith. Gautier has
outdone the vernacular poets by turning their own success against them, while
at the same time cementing the links between his work and theirs, making it
impossible to draw firm borders between the secular and the sacred. In the last
instance, his achievement also depends on the continuing success and popular-
ity of secular vernacular literature.

[53] See Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, pp. 21–22.

[54] On the *Miracles* as a Davidic project, and Gautier's self-construct as a conflation of David
and Ildefonsus, see Duys, 'Minstrel's Mantle and Monk's Hood'.

In addition to underlining the meaning of each tale with a conscientiously ostentatious display of verbal bravura, Gautier's paronomasia invites reflection on the nature of language itself, in particular on the position of the vernacular as a means of transmitting monastic culture to audiences, not all of which were literate in Latin. His success lies in bridging the worlds of court and monastery, achieving a synthesis apposite to both. Paronomasia is an indispensable part of his strategy to sustain the increasing respectability of the French vernacular, to the lexicon of which he also adds over six hundred words first attested in his work, which also contains more than 160 hapax legomena.

Given his clerical education, Gautier would have been famliar with the Latin traditions of paronomasia as well as earlier cases of its deployment in the vernacular. It would be doing him an injustice to conclude that his primary aim was simply to evoke admiration for his virtuosic versifying skills and verbal dexterity, since his art is dedicated to singing the praises of the Virgin. I have already argued that Gautier in some ways occupies a middle ground between the learned and the courtly, Latin and the vernacular. His awareness of language is quite as acute as, say, that of Thomas the Cistercian in his commentary on the Song of Songs,[55] but he lets the wordplay speak for itself, as it were, rarely discussing openly the actual etymological provenance and history of the words he manipulates so expertly. This puts something of an onus on a reader or listener to complete the exegesis and message of the tales, and the reception of the *Miracles* would doubtless have depended on the level of knowledge and education of each recipient. As far as the Song of Songs in particular is concerned, the linguistic aspects of the various Latin and vernacular commentary traditions could well have influenced the medieval reading of the *Miracles*.[56] Tony Hunt has plausibly argued that the nature of Gautier's paronomasia reflects a movement away from etymology as being principally concerned with word origins towards its incorporation into *derivatio* as a form of textual exegesis and *expositio*.[57] Not all, perhaps few, of Gautier's readers or listeners would have articulated an analysis of his art in these terms, but his challenge to consider the implications of paronomasia in each occurrence would have been eagerly taken up by those anxious to show their devotion to Our Lady and to help ensure their own salvation.

[55] Thomas the Cistercian, *In Cantica Canticorum eruditissimi commentarii*, ed. by Migne.

[56] For an overview, see *Le Chant des Chanz*, ed. by Hunt, pp. 9–15.

[57] Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, pp. 197–202.

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Soteriological Macaronics:
Ambiguum and Paronomasia in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*

Stephen Carey

Exploring the application of the rhetorical devices amibiguum and paronomasia in vernacular medieval literature from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries demands attention to both intra- and inter-linguistic wordplay. Medieval literature exhibits robust macaronic tendencies, not only because of the function of Latin within the cultures across Europe but also because of literary transmission between linguistic traditions, especially between French and the neighbouring languages of German, English, and Spanish. In her seminal examination of wordplay in the sermons of St Augustine, Christine Mohrmann highlights the importance of audience and asserts that an intimate and devoted public provides fertile ground for literary experimentation with ambiguum and paronomasia.[1] Many patrons of Middle High German literature maintained very close connections to France. The patrons and their courtiers were primarily educated in Paris and were consequently proficient in Latin and French, as well as being native German speakers. This audience provided an ideal context for Middle High German poets to play with German, Latin, and French. The following examination will concentrate primarily on Wolfram

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[1] Mohrmann, 'Das Wortspiel in den Augustinischen Sermones', p. 35: 'Und zwar möchte ich hier an erster Stelle darauf hinweisen, daß ein engerer, ertrauter Kreis den besten Boden für Wortspiele bietet'.

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von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. The early thirteenth-century German adaptation of Chrétien de Troye's *Li Contes del Graal* displays not only exploitation of the nuances afforded by the employment of ambiguum and paronomasia but also utilizes these rhetorical devices to advance and augment the work's soteriological narrative programme.

Germans studying in Paris and intermarrying between French and German nobility brought the French courtly culture to Germany. Landgrave Ludwig II of Thuringia, for example, sent his sons Ludwig, Heinrich, and Hermann to study in Paris.[2] Hermann, the later Hermann I (1155–1217), Margrave of Saxony and Landgrave of Thuringia, would go on to be the greatest patron of Middle High German literature. His court at the Wartburg in Eisenach hosted many of the greatest literary figures of the period, including Hendrik van Veldeke, Herbort von Fritzlar, Otte, Biterolf, Albrecht von Halberstadt, Walther von der Vogelweide, Heinrich von Morungen and, of course, Wolfram von Eschenbach.[3] The *Rheinhardsbrunner Chronik* (*c.* 1338) reports that Hermann enjoyed being read to before he fell asleep. Hermann preferred to hear passages from religious writings and tales of courageous and magnanimous rulers of the past in both Latin and German.[4] Additionally, Hermann was also quite the libertine with a penchant for pranks, the bawdy, and the boisterous. Walther von der Vogelweide complains about the raucous atmosphere at Hermann's court in his poem *Der in den ôren siech von ungesühte sî* (20. 4–15) (Whoever is suffering from maladies in their ears), and counsels anyone who is sensitive to noise to avoid Hermann's court.[5] This combination of linguistic diversity, literary production, and nearly incessant performance constituted the ideal setting for more complex forms of wordplay.

Mohrmann demonstrates that rhetoricians of Antiquity drew a distinction between ambiguum and paronomasia. Ambiguum is essentially diachronic discourse, an entirely semantic device in which two possible and often contradictory meanings inhabit the same word or locution. Metonymy provides the standard example of diachronic discourse and symbolism, as does exegesis. The symbol is not fixed, and several different allusions may coincide in a sin-

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[2] Bumke, *Höfische Kultur*, p. 106. See also Haeutle, 'Landgraf Hermann von Thüringen und seine Familie' and Schwarz, *Ludowinger*.

[3] Bumke, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im hohen Mittelalter*, p. 146.

[4] See *Cronica Reinhardsbrunnensis*, ed. by Holder-Egger, pp. 490–656, and Lemmer, *Der Dürnge bluome schînet dur den snê*, p. 9.

[5] Walther von der Vogelweide, *Leich, Lieder, Sangsprüche*, ed. by Cormeau.

gle locution or image.[6] In both linguistic and semiotic analysis, as well as in the theory of the novel developed by Mikhail Bahktin, diachronic discourse is a discourse of polysemy drawing on multiple senses or meanings for a given lexical item, not only each originating at a different stage of that word's diachronic development but also occupying different registers of discourse, so that two potentially contradictory meanings inhabit the same word.[7] Paronomasia differs from ambiguum in that the wordplay manipulates phonetic qualities of words in order to generate multiple semantic associations. In essence, paronomasia may accommodate ambiguum but includes a phonetic component typically expressed by the repetition of homonyms. Common classical examples are often inserted directly into the German texts as, for example, in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, 'l'ameir das waere minnen, | l'ameir bitter, la meir mer | der meine der dûhte in ein her' (11994–96) (*l'ameir* that would be love, *l'ameir* bitter, *la meir* the sea; it seems to have many meanings).[8] This example, however, points to the intensely macaronic quality of both paronomasia and ambiguum in Middle High German literature.

Mohrmann makes a further distinction between paronomasia and ambiguum. Namely, she claims that ambiguum, being more complex and less obvious, belongs to a higher rhetorical tradition and appears, therefore, extensively in the works of authors like Cicero. Paronomasia, she continues, flourishes more among the common people and, therefore, suits the purpose of preachers, like Augustine.[9] However, with the introduction of macaronic language as vehicle for wordplay, another explanation becomes apparent. The phonetic quality of paronomasia depends upon performance. Therefore, it is ideally suited for sermons or poems. Macaronic language is, perforce, the language of the people; the term 'macaronic' derives from the Italian *maccarone* (*macaronicus*), the food of the commoners. Macaronic wordplay combines elements of both ambiguum and paronomasia. Of course, the Ciceronian texts were also read aloud but not necessarily to the public at large. That paronomasia would be the preferred device for a live performance to a non-scholarly audience stems from its distinctly auditory features. As a combination of both paronomasia and ambiguum, the macaronic demonstrates the tenuous nature of a pure distinction between the two. For example, in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*,

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[6] Ladner, 'Medieval and Modern Understanding of Symbolism'.

[7] See Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel'.

[8] See Keith Busby, 'The Terminal Paronomasia of Gautier de Coinci', in this volume.

[9] Mohrmann, 'Das Wortspiel in den Augustinischen Sermones', p. 36.

the author describes a duchess in a torn and tattered dress, 'nantes iemen vilân | der het ir unrecht getân | wan si hete wênc an ir' (257. 23–25) (if someone were to call her *vilân*, he would be quite wrong because she had little on).[10] The joke relies on both the phonetic accordance of the French *vilân* (peasant) and the German *vil ân* (much on). Both the French and German meanings of *vilân* constitute an (in)appropriate description of a half-naked duchess. A skilful performer could exaggerate these lines to make both meanings apparent to the audience.

Another salient aspect of Middle High German literature finds expression in the abundance of speaking names. Often, these are simply of the variety of crass and crude names which abound in every European literary tradition and usually provide examples of neither paronomasia nor ambiguum. In Heinrich Wittenwiler's *Ring* (*c.* 1408), for example, the lovers are named Mätzli Rüerenzumph (Maid Touch-the-Penis) and Bertschi Triefnas (Guy Drip-nose). Yet, as Mohrmann notes, personal names represent one of the most fruitful sources of the use of paronomasia and ambiguum. She agrees that in this instance the two forms overlap. She asserts, however, that the etymological aspect of wordplay with names often serves to distinguish it superficially from other types of wordplay.[11] The distinction more precisely underscores the macaronic nature of onomastic wordplay. Many names originate in one language and then become standard in another through cultural exchange. Mohrmann observes a coincidence of paronomasia and ambiguum in onomastic wordplay with 'Christian' names because names arising due to cultural exchange are de facto macaronic. In the medieval German literary tradition, the work of Wolfram von Eschenbach most readily supports this assertion because the author consistently invents names that have French, German, and sometimes Latin meanings.

Often, the names in Wolfram's works are simply a phrase pulled from his French sources. The name of the duchess mentioned above, Jeschute, evidences this form. James W. Marchand explains that her name is derived from the French *gisoit* (*gesir*, 'lay'), which Wolfram took from his source for *Parzival*, Chrétien de Troye's *Li Contes del Graal*. Chrétien describes an anonymous

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[10] Marchand, 'Wolfram's Bawdy', p. 138.

[11] Mohrmann, 'Das Wortspiel in den Augustinischen Sermones', p. 37: 'Eine besondere Kategorie von Wortspielen sind die mit Eigennamen gebildeten. Manche von ihnen kann man zum Ambiguum rechnen, bisweilen auch nähern sie sich der Paronomasia, doch ist immer ein gewisser Unterschied von diesen beiden Arten vorhanden, weil beim Namenspiel das etymologische Moment viel starker wirkt als in den anderen Fällen'.

duchess: 'el lit toute seule gisoit une pucelete endormie' (671–72).[12] Jeschute's name speaks to the state in which the hero first encounters her, 'she lays'. These types of plays on names abound in Wolfram's *Parzival*. The name of Parzival's father, Gahmuret Anschouwe, provides an example of a name playing on Latin, German, and French.[13] The name Gahmuret combines the Middle High German for 'fast' (*gah*) and the Latin for 'love' (*amor*) to function as a homophone to the extant French name, Gomoret. With the addition of the byname Anschouwe (*anschauen*, 'to look upon'), Parzival's father becomes Gahmuret Anschouwe; the one who is 'quick to love at first sight'. He does precisely this in the text. Anschouwe is often incorrectly identified as Anjou but appears nowhere else before or after as a German equivalent for the place. Jakob Grimm initially identified Anschouwe incorrectly as Anjou, and this continues in the scholarship. Certainly, the term constitues a homophonic reference to the place. However, all recorded instances of the names Gahmuret and Anschouwe appear after *Parzival* and are references to this character. Wolfram invented this name to provide readers with interpretive clues.

The name of Parzival's wife, Condwiramurs, provides yet another example. The name is Wolfram's invention, completely unique to *Parzival*. Condwiramurs scans unambiguously as 'love leads' (*conduir amor*) but the name can also be parsed as 'the cunt makes love' (*con faire amor*), depending on whether the name gets two beats or four with a line. This name especially supports Mohrmann's assertion that sometimes wordplay and allegory are indistinguishable.[14] In the context of the rise of vernacular literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a marked move away from the personification (*prosopopeia*), with protagonists like Love or Virtue as found in the allegories of Alain de Lille and other Latin works surrounding the so-called School of Chartres, becomes one of the defining characteristics of the romances.[15] A more complex employment of symbol emerges as the authors begin to write as they read, exegetically.[16]

Readers will almost certainly reject the *con faire amor* reading provided above as a matter of course. Yet the text supports that reading both contextually and metrically, regardless of how radical it may seem. Actually, this kind

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[12] Marchand, 'Wolfram's Bawdy', p. 131.

[13] See Bartsch, 'Die Eigennamen in Wolframs *Parzival* und *Titurel*', p. 136.

[14] Mohrmann, 'Das Wortspiel in den Augustinischen Sermones', p. 40: 'manchmal [sind] Wortpiel und allegorische Deutung fast nicht zu trennen'.

[15] Carey, 'Chartrian Influence and German Reception'.

[16] Carey, 'Medieval Literary Consciousness and Narrative Innovation in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*'.

of wordplay represents no anomaly and appears in the French literature of the same era, for example, in the works of Guillaume IX and Aldric del Vilar.[17] Despite the fact that Wolfram von Eschenbach uses more French words than any other Middle High German poet, scholarship on Wolfram's *Parzival* has been far more reluctant to engage the plethora of bawdy French puns in the text.[18] In her study of medieval French poetry, *The Game of Love: Troubadour Wordplay*, Laura Kendrick demonstrates that this kind of bawdy wordplay was standard among Wolfram's contemporaries in France. Kendrick points to the oral performances of medieval French poetry that were intended to 'oscillate between piety and obscenity'.[19] Kendrick asserts that medieval poets reveled in the challenge of creating and interpreting text, even longer phrases, in a manner which could maintain both a sacred and profane meaning. This was a mechanism constantly at play in oral performance. Troubadours would sing songs in a counter-key in order to unlock ambiguities. As Kendrick notes, 'Marcabru complained that there were too many counterkeys with pernicious result and that not a *con* — and not a text — remained wholly one man's; some else was always breaking into it'. One observes this in Marcabru's poem 41, *Pus s'enfulleysson li verjan* (Since the orchards sprout leaves): 'Tans n'i vei dels contraclaviers, | Greu sai remanra conz entiers | a crebar ni a meich partir' (I see so many counter keys | that there will hardly *a cunt / with some* | remain whole to smash or split).[20] However, the desire to create texts that could be received simultaneously as both profane and sacred not only provided an instance for comic relief but also allowed authors like Wolfram von Eschenbach to reflect human condition as understood within Augustine of Hippo's salvation history.

The extent to which an author relied on codified poetic forms limited the reassertion of metonymy in a given text. The desire to translate the progression of the hero and the meaning of the adventure into religious concepts complicated the import of prevailing poetic prescriptions, like those of the School of

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[17] Makin, *Provence and Pound*, p. 110.

[18] Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, p. 19. See also Wolf, 'Vom persönlichen Stil Wolframs in seiner dichterischen Bedeutung', p. 284: '[Die] Einschaltung französischer Worte ebenso wie die Aufnahme aus dem Französischen stammender Fremdworte beruht auch nicht auf einer Abhängigkeit von der Quelle (die für die Sigunendichtung ja gar nicht vorlag), das zeigt der Vergleich [mit der jeweiligen Quelle], sondern entspringt nur der Lust am Fremdartgien'.

[19] Kendrick, *The Game of Love*, p. 98.

[20] Kendrick, *The Game of Love*, p. 185. The play here is on *cons* as female genitalia and *conz* as the contraction *con + uns* meaning 'with some'.

Chartes or the *Artes Poeticae*.[21] As numerous studies demonstrate, this was an age of experimentation in which developments in Latin literature were applied and transformed in the vernacular literature. The Latin tradition was also sometimes transmitted in derivative form from one vernacular work to another.[22] Especially in the works of Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach, the Chartrian triadic cycle of Nature, Culture, and Cosmos takes on soteriological import that moves beyond a mere metaphorical connection.[23] The universal quality of the Chartrian triadic cycle attains real personal meaning as the figures move through spiritual or psychological states that mirror the states of religious awareness associated with the soteriological counterpart to the Chartrian cycle. In the German adaptations, the hero's understanding of a given virtue often progresses from a pagan state corresponding to the initial state of Grace in the Garden of Eden and the Chartrian stage of Nature (*ante legem*). The hero then progresses through a state of literal understanding of religious prescriptions which corresponds to the Fall and the Chartrian stage of Culture (*sub legem*). Finally, the hero reaches a fully Christian state of awareness that manifests the Restoration of Christian salvation and finds a counterpart in the Chartrian stage of Cosmos (*sub gratia*). However, as texts became more complicated, attempts to present actual human psychology demanded more complex discourse.

Especially in Wolfram's text, a reliance on double-voiced constructions and multivalence stems from the realization that these states always exist simultaneously within human psychology and that human development is anything but linear. Concentration on the internal development of the protagonist re-established time as a dynamic element in the romances that impacted on the import of the communication; the meaning changes with the changing perspectives of the hero and the audience. The poet employs paronomasia and ambiguum to enable the text to express the instability of human psychology and the often cyclical nature of development occasioned by the fleeting attainment of an ideal.

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[21] Using the term 'School of Chartres' has been out of fashion since R. W. Southern pointed out that much of the work took place in Paris (Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies*). However, as Édouard Jeauneau has demonstrated again in recent years, Chartres is a very useful term for describing a school of thought and at least one of the figures involved did actually teach at Chartres. See Jeauneau, *Rethinking the School of Chartres*.

[22] Luttrell, *The Creation of the First Arthurian Romance* and Luttrell, 'Chrestien de Troyes and Alan of Lille', pp. 270–75.

[23] Maddox, 'Nature and Narrative in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*', pp. 72–73.

Consider Gahmuret's first love interest, Belakane. The most obvious paronym in Old French is *belle quenne* (sweet cheeks) but the far more common reading of *belle con* could only be overlooked intentionally.[24] Gahmuret and Belakane's son Feirefiz has a name that provides the male parallel to his mother's name. *Faire fiz* can mean three different things: beautiful boy (*fils*); fair face or countenance (*vis/visage*); and stunning cock (*vis*). These parallels are difficult to overlook. Both the boy (Feirefiz) and his mother (Belakane) are pagans, all the possible meanings of their names are purely physical — relegating them soteriologically to the naturalistic state associated with the period before the Mosaic covenant, *ante legem*. In keeping with salvation history, Christians are both subject to the law (*sub legem*) and open to grace (*sub gratia*). Therefore, unlike the purely corporeal meanings attached to the non-Christians in the text, the names of those associated with the Grail Family exhibit both physical and erotic connotations as well as a meaning that points to a specifically Christian virtue. The name of Parzival's mother, Herzeloyde (which Wagner falsely etymologized as *Herzeleid*), actually translates as 'heart's furrow' and recalls the agony of the Holy Virgin as Simeon foretold the sorrow that would makes furrows in her heart. However, given that Wolfram also refers to the breasts as *herzen dach* (3. 22) (heart's roof), one can easily imagine that 'heart's furrow' also refers to the female genitalia. Herzeloyde's sister is named Repanse de Schoye (*repanser de joie*). This name can have several connotations depending on the 'joy' in question. *Repanser* means 'to look at' or 'to contemplate'. Parzival's aunt provides an instance for contemplating the beatific vision as the Grail-bearer. Equally plausible is that as the object of desire for a man with a name that translates as 'beautiful penis', she provides an instance for contemplating sexual ecstasy by spreading her legs. Most significantly for Wolfram, these meanings converge on the name simultaneously.

Wolfram tells us that Parzival's name means *rehte enmitten durch* (split it up the middle) (*Parz*. 140. 17). In terms of the tale, this can refer to the main goal of the hero, to balance earthly and heavenly concerns, to be pleasing to both God and man. In terms of the bawdy level of the tale, again, this name is highly suggestive of the male role in coitus. Unlike the names of Belakane and Feirefiz, however, the names of Herzeloyde, Repanse de Schoye, and Parzival and Condwiramurs all have a soteriological aspect that intimates a movement from natural erotic desire through cultural belonging and proper social behaviour to a higher Christian virtue while also manifesting the simultaneous exist-

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[24] Bartsch, 'Die Eigennamen in Wolframs *Parzival* und *Titurel*'. Karl Bartsch believed that Wolfram could read Old Provençal.

ence of each these states within the individual human psyche. It is also important to again recall that all of these names are original to Wolfram. He invents them, and they are found nowhere else before his work.

The name Condwiramurs abounds with intratextual allusions, which support a reading that most clearly touches on all three of the soteriological levels outlined briefly above. However, the allusions are, as over two hundred years of scholarship has amply demonstrated, not immediately clear if the text is not experienced aurally. Wolfram employs metrical cues that force the audience to hear the different possible interpretations of the name. The first clue comes with the exceedingly enigmatic translation that the author himself provides for the name.

> Condwîr âmûrs:
> diu truoc den rehten bêâ curs.
> Der name ist tiuschen schoener lîp. (*Parz.* 187, 21–23)

> [Condwîrâmûrs
> she had a real *bêâ curs*.
> The name means beautiful body in German.]

Wolfram would not have needed to translate *bêâ curs* for his largely trilingual audience, as most would have understood German, French, and Latin. He intentionally confronts the audience with the statement, 'the name means beautiful body in German'. Of course, the German *schoener lîp* is a translation of *bêâ curs*, but neither reflects a translation of the speaking name *Condwîr âmûrs* unless the bawdy meaning is considered. Moreover, following the rhythm of the poem, her name gets four beats and would be read and heard as *con faire amour*.[25] This is one possible parsing. The meaning of *con* and *amour* are clear. Variation comes into play with the middle element. Other feasible interpretations would include 'con fis amour' (cunt penis love), 'con wis amour' (white cunt love), or even playing off of *douer* 'gift/to give', 'con douer amour' (cunt gives love). The point being here that the four beats invite an interpretation other than 'conduire amour' (love leads). However, these variant meanings may coexist. Wolfram explicitly states that he intentionally creates phonological affinities. The variant meanings do not cancel each other out. The recipient of the tale must decide what they hear.

Much has been written regarding the rogue nature of Parzival's father, Gahmuret. The story of his various affairs with women offers first an example in which Wolfram plays on the double meaning of the word *urloup* 'to take leave/

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[25] Carey, 'The Critics Remain Silent at the Banquet of Words'.

indulgence' as well as an example in which the word *kiusche* 'chastity/modesty' is not made ambiguous by homophonic or synonymic association but rendered ironic entirely through context. Gahmuret finds himself torn between the love of three women: the *kiusche* 'chaste' Ampflîse (*Parz.* 87. 7) the *werdiu kiusche* 'worthily chaste' Belakâne (*Parz.* 90. 20), and Herzeloyde, whose 'kiusche was für prîs erkant' (*Parz.* 103. 5) (chastity was known as a prize). Ampflîse is the female acquaintance (*wîplîch geselleschaft*) (*Parz.* 12. 6–8) who outfits Gahmuret for his first expedition to the heathen lands. As Gahmuret leaves Ampflîse, we are told of his attitude towards love and knighthood:

> an sînem dienste lac gewin,
> der wîbe minne und ir gruoz:
> doch wart im selten kumbers buoz.
> urloup nam der wîgant. (*Parz.* 12. 12–15)

[His service brought profit the love of women and their favour; however, he was seldom plagued by worries, the warrior took leave.]

Aside from the literal function these lines fulfil in the narrative context, they also communicate alternate meanings, that expose Gahmuret's true character. Literally, these lines seem to state that Gahmuret's service was rewarded with the affection of many women, but his heart remained restless, and so he departed. However, given the sexual connotations of the word *urloup* as indulgence, the same lines could also mean that the mere affection of women was seldom enough for him, he had to have sex with them all too, and the last line may be translated as 'the warrior took liberties'.[26]

The following lines from *Titurel* confirm a sexual relationship between Ampflîse and Gahmuret.

> Wie [...] Gahmuret schiet von Belakânen
> und wie werdeclîchen — er erwarp di swester Schoysîânen

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[26] Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, p. 40: 'das mhd. Wort urloup [...] heißt sowohl >Abschied< als auch >Hingabe<: das gegenseitige >Erlauben< der Liebenden'. We also observe that lines *Parz.* 12. 13–15 mimic a ploy Wolfram uses in his *Tagelieder*, namely to take advantge of the double meaning of the word *urloup* which can be either 'to depart' or 'to surrender to a sexual embrace'. Compare *Parz.*12. 13–15 with *Sîne klâwen* (II. 5. 6–8), '(des wold in wenden wahters dôn): | urloup nâh un nâher baz | mit kusse und anders gab in minne lôn', and *Ez ist nu tac* (VII. 3. 3–9), where Wolfram explicitly points out the double meaning of *urloup*: 'urlop er nam, — daz dô wol zam; — nu merket wie: | da ergienc ein schimpf bî klage. | sie heten beide sich bewegen, | ezn wart sô nâhe nie gelegen, | des noch diu minne hât den prîs: | obe der sunnen drî mit blicke waeren, | sin möhten zwischen si geliuhten'.

und wie er sich enbrach der Franzoisinne

des wil ich hie geswîgen, — und künden iu von magtuomlîcher

minne. (37. 1–4)

[How [...] Gahmuret left Belakâne and how he laudably gained the sister of Schoy-
siane and how he relieved himself of the French woman of that I want to remain
silent — and tell you of maidenly love.]

The standard reading of the verb *sich enbrechen* 'to break off, take leave' with a
dative object would simply refer to Gahmuret's dismissal of Ampflîse's claims
on his service. However, the transitive form of this verb can also mean *abbahnen*
('to unimpede') or *öffnen* ('to open'). The passage then also alludes to sex, spe-
cifically the loss of Ampflîse's virginity, a reading invited by the following line.
Furthermore, a sly reference to Gahmuret's relationship to Ampflîse appears in
the Antikônie/Gâwan episode (*Parz.* 406. 3–6). Antikônie, Gahmuret's niece,
remarks that her uncle's and Ampflîse's friendship was at the very least *ungastlîch*
'un-guestly', that is, more than a little friendly.[27] The *kiusche* of Ampflîse might
be understood as an external adherence to courtly mores and an ironic refer-
ence to the fact that she lacks chastity. Belakâne's *werdiu kiusche*, on the other
hand, seemingly encompasses the fullness of the virtue as she rejected a war-
rior named Isenhart 'Iron-hard' before encountering Gahmuret. Ambiguities
abound in determining the meaning of *kiusche* as it is used for the first time
to describe Gahmuret's third love interest, Herzeloyde: 'ir kiusche was für prîs

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[27] Poag, 'Wolfram von Eschenbach's Antikonie'. Poag argues convincingly for an ironic
reading of references to Antikonie's *kiusche*. Wolfram uses the same kind of irony with Antikônie
as he does with her uncle Gahmuret (NB, the vast majority of the characters in the text are
related on some level): 'da ergienc ein kus ungastlîch. | zuo der meide zühte rîch | saz der wol
geborne gast' (*Parz.* 405. 21–23). The context of this scene makes the sexual connotations quite
clear: Gâwân rides into Schanpfanzun and meets Vergulaht whose falcons (Gâwân) have been
dragged down into the water by their prey (Antikônîe), and Vergulaht then loses his clothes (his
honour) trying to save them (*Parz.* 400. 1–30). Then Liddamus specifically refers to Gâwân as a
captured bird, 'des sî hie pfant hêr Gâwân: | der vederslagt ûf iweren klobn (*Parz.* 425. 20–21).
In this context a straight reading of *kiusche* is impossible. One cannot simply relieve the word
kiusche of it's sexual connotations when they become inconvenient. It is quite clear that Gâwân
sleeps with Antikônîe because she wakes up the next morning with lips bright red from being
kissed (a favourite image of Wolfram's) (*Parz.* 426. 11–427. 4). Finally, Wolfram warns us about
a superficial kind of *kiusche* earlier in the poem, so we should not be surprised if *kiusche* then is
applied to Anitkônîe ironically. Wolfram tells us that some women who pretend to have *kiusche*
really do not: 'vor gesten sint se an kiuschen siten: | ir herzen wille hât versniten | swaz mac an
den gebaerden sîn' (*Parz.* 201. 27–29). For even further evidence of the looseness at Antikônîe's
Court, see *Parz.* 424. 24–30.

erkant' (*Parz*. 103. 5). This could either mean that her *kiusche* was well known and praiseworthy or that it was for sale (keeping in mind that she has offered herself as the prize for the tournament winner).[28] These provide examples of wordplay and irony typical of Wolfram's style. However, with regard to the speaking names in the text, paronomasia and ambiguum are also employed to allow Wolfram to further the aims of his narrative programme.

The soteriological structure apparent in the multivalence of Wolfram's speaking names informs several aspects of the text including the author's account of the tale's origins. Wolfram ironically refers to his source as the 'diu verholnen maere umben grâl' (*Parz*. 452. 30) (obscure story of the Grail). Wolfram claims that Kyôt the Provençal gained, by the grace of baptism, the ability to read the tale of the Grail in a *heidnische* 'heathen / Arabic' manuscript found in Toledo. Flegetânîs, a heathen, specifically a Jew descended from King Solomon, composed this Arabic manuscript after divining the story of the Grail from his study of the stars (*Parz*. 453. 1–455. 22).[29] This rather outlandish list of sources traverses the entire range of salvation history. It reproduces the cycle of Nature (the story is first revealed in the stars), Culture (put to paper in Arabic), and Cosmos (revealed to a Christian audience by the grace of baptism). Wolfram completely incorporates the Chartrian cycle, the scientific understanding of the world, into a Christian one. The story passes through the stages of *ante legem* and *sub legem* in the person of 'ein heiden Flegetânîs [...] ûz israhêlscher sippe' (*Parz*. 453. 23–26) (a heathen Flegetânis [...] of the tribe of Israel) to Kyôt, who deciphers it with aid of his baptism (*sub gratia*) (*Parz*. 453. 18). The historical coincidence of the transfer of Arabic learning to the

[28] 'si was ein maget, niht ein wîp, | und bôt zwei lant unde ir lîp | swer dâ den prîs bezalte' (*Parz*. 60. 15–17). See also Lexer *Mittelhochdeutsches Taschenwörterbuch*: 'prîs -stm. lob, ruhm, wert, preis; herrlichkeit; etwas preiswertes; preiswerte beschaffenheit'.

[29] Wolfram informs us that the author of his source text, Kyôt la schantiure, searched for the story in Latin and French chronicles from Britannia, Ireland, France, and Anjou until he found the correct tale. In his *Tristan* (146–54), Gottfried von Straßbourg makes similar claims about his source author, Thômas von Britanje. Early Wolfram scholar John Meier believes that Wolfram is parodying Gottfried with the outlandish list of sources, but more than parody is at stake here. Wolfram places his work in a sotereological scheme lacking in Gottfried's *Tristan*. See Meier, 'Wolfram von Eschenbach und einige seiner Zeitgenossen', p. 516: 'Wir werden uns weiter die Frage vorlegen dürfen, ob nicht die merkwürdige, an bestimmte Tristanstellen anklingende Art, in der Wolfram von Kyot und der Auffindung der Graldichtung spricht, direkt unter dem Einfluß Gottfrieds zu stande gekommen ist. Ob es nicht eine ironische Verspottung Gottfrieds, indem er die ganze tolle Geschichte über das Gralbuch ausheckt, und zugleich doch eine Beschwichtigung des großen Publikums war, das auf die durch eine Quelle bezeugte Authentizität Wert legte, die Wolfram damit beabsichtigte?'

West in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries provides some context for this tall tale. However, Wolfram does not seriously attempt to establish his sources in the manner of the *poeta et historiographus*. After two centuries of searching, no records of such persons have ever been found anywhere, and the Kyôt story is considered a fiction and has never been indentified. Perhaps Wolfram's proported source *Kyot la schantiure* (*Parz.* 416. 21) should be read as 'Qui joue le chanteur' (Who plays with the singer), a phrase which may refer to Wolfram himself, someone who played around with singers he heard.[30]

Religious chronological structures, like the soteriological scheme of *ante legem*, *sub legem*, and *sub gratia*, figure significantly in the formulation, organization, and understanding of time in the romances. Wolfram's *Parzival* exhibits this kind of chronotopic organization. In *Parzival*, for example, Wolfram utilizes the field at Plimizœl to demarcate periods of transition. The move from *ante legem* to *sub legem*, from primal ignorance to an Arthurian or Mosaic understanding and relation to society, culminates at the first Plimizœl episode, the *Blutstropfenepisode* (Book VI). The second Plimizœl episode (Book IX) marks the move from *sub legem* to *sub gratia*, from the Arthurian external understanding of the world to a deeper understanding of Christian values. However, these stages of awareness do not necessarily hold. Parzival and his Uncle Trevrizent baptize his long-lost brother Feirefiz simply to satisfy the latter's desire to marry Parzival's aunt, Repanse de Schoye (*Parz.* 818. 1–11). On the one hand, this action demonstrates the fact that love indeed does lead and that Feirefiz's sexual urges have put him on the path to Christian salvation. On the other hand, little concern is given to the fact that Feirefiz is already married to a woman aptly named Secundilla, due to her clearly subordinate role. (Secundilla is also a fifth-century martyr, as well as a common Roman name for a prostitute.)[31] Ironically, she is Feirefiz's third wife (*Parz.* 771. 15–19), and after he rejects her and marries his half brother's aunt, the court learns that Secundilla conveniently died (*Parz.* 821. 18–20; 823. 4–7). Furthermore, our heroes do not consider the fact that the Grail does not designate Feirefiz as the rightful husband for Repanse de Schoye and thus the marriage is unlawful.

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[30] James F. Poag first suggested the *Qui joet* solution to the Kyôt question. See Poag, 'Wolfram von Eschenbach'. Poag reads *laschantiure* as either *lasche chanteor* (poor or weak singer) or as *lasche ch(e)anceor* (undisciplined dicer). He reads Kyôt as *Ky yot* or *Qui joet* (he who plays at dice or as a minstrel). Poag sees the possibility of the poem supporting all of these meanings simultaneously. Certainly, support for the Kyôt etymology can be found in the fact that a similar etymology works for Quixote.

[31] Danielewicz, 'On the Lacris Inscription', p. 332.

The meaning of Wolfram's tale depends, in large part, on the reader's personal experience of the work as performance. However, the religious consciousness informing the text does indeed provide a frame of reference informing the resulting ambiguity. This does not suggest that the meaning of the text is open as in the modern novel; rather it indicates that the moral will not be spelled out. Wolfram requires that the reader/listener actively experience the text. Walter Haug proposes a very convincing reason for the intentional ambiguity of the work: His work does not offer a religious prescription or a teaching, but rather attempts to generate a religious experience that can only be attained in the moment, so that the proper relationship to his work is synonymous with the path to salvation.[32] The attitudes of the listener/reader will determine the message.

At any point in the narrative, the text can be understood in an uncourtly (*ante legem*), courtly (*sub legem*), or spiritually profound (*sub gratia*) manner. For example, Herzelodye's advice to Parzival, 'ob dich ein grâ wîse man | zuht wil lêren als er wol kan, | dem soltu gerne volgen' (*Parz.* 127. 21–23) (if a gray wise man wants to teach you proper behaviour as he is indeed able, you should follow him), may be understood on a courtly level when applied to Gurnemanz (*Parz.* 162. 29–30), who leads Parzival to Lîaze, Condwîramurs, and courtly *minne*. This advice can take on a more profound meaning when applied to Kahenîs, the *rîter grâ* 'gray knight' (*Parz.* 446. 11–449. 11) who directs Parzival to Trevrizent and the *gotlîchen minne* of the Grail. The three key pieces of advice that Parzival receives provide the clearest example of how the hero's movement through time generates ambiguity. In response to her son's question as to the nature of God, Herzeloyde provides a simple explanation in terms of light and darkness (*Parz.* 119. 18–28). Herzeloyde's desire to keep her son isolated from the world certainly influences her formulation. Nonetheless, her advice perfectly communicates orthodox Christian beliefs in childish terms. Parzival misunderstands this and later believes that the knights he encounters

[32] Haug, 'Die Symbolstruktur des höfischen Romans und ihre Auflösung bei Wolfram von Eschenbach', p. 512: 'Da das, was sein Werk bietet, nicht ein Glaubensrezept, nicht eine Lehre ist [...] sondern auf die nur in der Aktualität zu vermittelnde religiöse Erfahrung zielt, so ist das adäquate Verhalten gegenüber seinem Werk gleichbedeutend mit dem Weg zum Heil'. D. H. Green also points to this phenomenon in Parzival, Green, *The Art of Recognition*, p. 14: '[in *Parzival*,] we have a threefold pattern: a first stage in which the listeners know for certain as little as Parzival; a second stage in which they realise more than he does; and a third stage in which the hero once more draws level with them. The result of this shifting pattern is that the listeners, sharing ignorance with Parzival, are invited to make his experience their own, but are also given the superior knowledge with which to ascertain his ignorance'.

are gods by virtue of their shiny armor (*Parz.* 121. 1–2). Perspective determines the meaning of the advice. Parzival also misunderstands Herzeloyde's advice in matters of love (*Parz.* 127. 25–128. 2), which leads to the ravishing of Jeschute (*Parz.* 130. 26–131. 21). The hero then chances upon Gurnemanz and receives further instruction (*Parz.* 170. 10–173. 6). Gurnemanz, a model knight, focuses on virtues and behaviour befitting his social position. His advice on love adds to that of Herzeloyde but also obviously serves the ageing knight's desire to gain Parzival as a son-in-law. Again, Gurnemanz's advice has a spiritual component, but Parzival fails to recognize the depth of the teaching, and this misunderstanding contributes to the young knight's tragic silence at the Grail Castle. Finally, in Book IX, Parzival receives a lengthy lesson from his uncle, the hermit Trevrizent. Recalling Herzeloyde's advice (*Parz.* 119. 17–28), Trevrizent explains that God, the *wâren minnaere* (true lover) (*Parz.* 466. 1), is *ein durchliuhtec lieht* (a transcendent light) (*Parz.* 466. 3), who judges a person based on the contents of their hearts (*Parz.* 466. 24). Trevrizent's teaching reveals the true spiritual depth of his previous advice. He clarifies and correlates the metaphysics of the light metaphor found in Herzeloyde's advice with Gurnemanz's treatment of love (*Parz.* 466. 1–467. 10). Parzival, unable to fully understand the previous advice, gains a deeper consciousness of virtue and love. Trevrizent advances a theory of love that communicates the proper *ordo amoris*.[33] Subsequently, Parzival attains an awareness of compassion that enables him to bring the adventure of the Grail to a successful conclusion. However, as with the advice of Herzeloyde and Gurnemanz, Trevrizent's own perspective colours his advice. The hermit believes that he is speaking with the uncourtly Lähelîn, who usurped Parzival's rightful inheritance. The competing perspectives, intentions, and desires generate an ambiguity that parallels the paronomasia found in the speaking names. The perspective of the reader also participates in this nexus of shifting perspectives that the names themselves deliver in a concentrated form.[34]

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[33] Poag, '*Wîp und Grâl*', p. 206: '*wîp* and *grâl*, are symbols for the medieval *ordo amoris* [...]. The passions of love and anger bring Parzival to turn the medieval *ordo amoris* upside down'.

[34] Green, *The Art of Recognition*, pp. 283–84: 'The range of explanations adduced to account for success or failure in recognition is thus extremely wide and rich. [... Wolfram shows] how the theme of recognition arises from the interplay of many separate details. But he goes much further than this, showing that recognition may be assisted or hindered not just by external factors such as heraldic signs, a gesture or the time of day, but more critically by the psychological predisposition of the person who has to do the recognising. This person's task may be made easier or more difficult by the readiness, previous experience and general awareness he manages

Wolfram wrote his prologue after he formulated the narrative programme described above. Fully conscious of the poetic norms and the Chartrian strictures that his tale inherits, contests, and rejects, Wolfram attacks aspects of these influences in the works of his contemporaries and fully defends his narrative style. In his discussion of the *Parzival* prologue, Walter Haug maintains that '[Der] Positionsbestimmung im Verhältnis zum Vorgänger gelten zu einem nicht geringen Teil die theoretischen Überlegungen des *Parzival*-Prologes'.[35]

> Ist zwîvel herzen nâchgebûr
> daz muoz der sêle werden sûr
> gesmaehet unde gezieret
> ist, swâ sich parrieret
> unverzaget mannes muot,
> als agelstern varwe tuot.
> der mac dennoch wesen geil:
> wand an im sint beidiu teil,
> des himels und der helle.
> der unstaete geselle
> hât die swarzen varwe gar,
> und wirt och nâch der vinster var:
> sô habet sich an die blanken
> der mit staeten gedanken. (*Parz*. 1. 1–14)

[If doubt is the neighbour of the heart it will become sour for the soul, it is disgraced and adorned, indeed meshed is the undaunted manly courage like the plumage of a magpie. Still he may be saved: because both have a part in him, heaven and hell. The unreliable companion will have all of the darkness and will go to hell: so may he hold onto the lightness he with upright thoughts.]

First, the recognition of an alternative, possibly obscene, meaning does not cancel out a traditional reading. As Wolfram promises in the prologue, the double meanings coexist like the black-and-white plumage of the magpie. Secondly, these opening lines are devoted to the state of mind of the person hearing the tale. In other words, Wolfram rejects that he as an author creates the meaning of the tale. The whole work opens up with a statement that could be paraphrased as 'ultimately the recipient will determine the meaning of this tale'.

(or fails) to bring to bear, and there are occasions when intuitive insight is able to pierce to the heart of the matter and dispense with outward pointers'.

[35] Haug, 'Das Literaturtheoretische Konzept Wolframs von Eschenbach im *Parzival*-Prolog', p. 155.

Wolfram devotes the adjoining verses of the prologue to the complex nature
of his work:

> diz vliegende bîspel
> ist tumben liuten gar ze snel,
> sine mugens niht erdenken:
> wand ez kan vor in wenken
> rehte alsam ein schellec hase.
> zin anderhalp ame glase
> geleichet, und des blinden troum,
> die gebent antlützes roum,
> doch mac mit staete niht gesîn
> dirre trüebe lîhte schîn:
> er machet kurze fröude alwâr. (*Parz*. 1. 15–25)

[This flying example is too quick for the dumb they cannot conceive it because it
scampers from them like a frightened rabbit. Like tin on the back of a glass and the
blind man's dream they give rise to appearances but these hold no constancy; with
their cloudy airy appearance they provide but brief pleasure.]

Wolfram admits that the example he provides offers little clarity and that the
meaning of his text can slip by the audience like a frightened rabbit scamper-
ing through the woods. He readily admits that he has deliberately composed
his text in such a way that the meaning will often be ambiguous or inconstant.
Constancy (*staete*), however, is precisely what he demands from his audience.
He concentrates on the deceptive quality of the surface meaning. The tale may
fool the audience, providing them only with an inverted glimpse of a tran-
sient image, like a mirror or a dream. The religious import of these verses is an
apparent allusion to the famous words of the Pauline Epistle, 'For now we see
through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall
I know even as also I am known' (1 Cor. 13. 12). The literal meaning of the tale,
unilluminated by the fullness of virtue, provides only a paltry reflection of its
full import.

Wolfram equates those who would base an interpretation of the tale on the
surface meaning with children who would seek to pull hairs from the palm of
his hand. He criticizes those who look for meaning behind images grounded
in the transience of this world. They are like fools who would look for fire in a
spring or dew in the sun.

> wer roufet mich dâ nie kein hâr
> gewuohs, inne an mîner hant?
> der hât vil nâhe griffe erkant.

> sprich ich gein den vorhten och,
> daz glîchet mîner witze doch.
>
> wil ich triwe vinden
> aldâ si kan verswinden,
> als viur in dem brunnen
> unt daz tou von der sunnen? (*Parz.* 1. 26–2. 4)

[Who would tug at me where never a hair grew on the inside of my hand? That one knows how to grab very closely. If I then cry 'ouch' in face of this harassment that simply matches my wits.

Do you think I want to find fidelity where it can soon vanish like fire in a spring and the dew under the sun?]

Applied to the literary programme of the text these verses constitute a rejection of the notion of a fixed meaning inherent in poetry. The arbitrary assignment of philosophical truths to poetic devices is of fleeting value. The meaning of such images changes with each reader. Those seeking that kind of meaning in his text search in vain. The meaning comes to fruition in the experience of the text itself, in the act of communication. Wolfram posits an ideal reader who can weather the irregularities and incongruities of his narrative until the very end (*Parz.* 2. 5–19). He manipulates several languages in order to take advantage of the multiple perspectives of the audience. Wolfram tells us that he will not find integrity in images that dissipate like fire in running water (*Parz.* 2. 3).[36] Finally, Wolfram alludes to a story found in Nigellus de Longchamps's *Speculum stultorum* (*Parz.* 2. 20–22) about a cow who, unable to wait for the spring thaw, loses her tail when she impatiently tries to pull it free from a frozen fence. In the summer, she is unable to protect herself from the flies that descend upon her barren rear-flank. So too, the reader seeking to extract truth from distinct elements of the tale will lose the main thread and be unable to ward off the nagging inconsistencies that a hasty and fixed interpretation would surely generate.

Without contradicting traditional interpretations, the introductory verses of the prologue may be read as an admission of the multivalence of the text, thus fully in line with the bawdy readings of the names discussed above. The opening lines of the prologue could be paraphrased as follows: 'If you take the

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[36] This difficult line, as Peter Knecht demonstrates, also points to the instability of language, 'Auf mittelhochdeutsch stehen ["brennen" und "Brunnen"] einander schon [...] viel näher, weil das intransitive Verb "brinnen" stark flektiert wird und weil also das Partizip Perfekt "gebrunnen" lautet, nicht "gebrannt"'. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. by Knecht and Schirok, p. 833.

ambiguity of this story to your heart, the spirit (of the story) will be endangered. This story will appear both praiseworthy (modest) and disgraceful (immodest) for him whose brazen manly spirit is multicoloured mesh like the plumage of a magpie (keeping in mind the sexual connotations of *unversaget mannes muot* "undaunted virility"). He might see the blessing in this story after all because both heaven and hell have a part of him (just as both heaven and hell have a part in this story). The inconstant one (*unstaete geselle* "unreliable companion") takes on the colours of darkness (hears the profane messages of the text), but those who have pure and constant thoughts cling to the white (those who strive to be pure of heart will hear the spiritual message)'.[37] This liberal, yet not unjustified, interpretation reinforces the idea that Wolfram purposefully structured the text so that a clearcut moral would not be readily available. The audience, however, if they are able to navigate the competing meanings, can recognize the critique of courtly mores and poetic norms inherent in *Parzival*. The meaning of the story will adhere to the ears and mindset of the listener.[38]

   In Wolfram's *Parzival*, the hero remains imperfect from beginning to end. There are no perfect figures in Wolfram's text. Wolfram completes Chrétien's work and even adds a prehistory to the story, that of Parzival's father, Gahmuret. Wolfram employs this figure in order to establish the underlying theme, the hero's imperfect nature, as an inherited attribute. By tracing Gahmuret's line-

[37] The word *unstaete* only appears one other time in the entire text (*Parz.* 732. 6), and it is when Parzival asks himself — rhetorically — if he should perhaps seek the *grüez* of another women besides Condwîramurs.

[38] In the prologue, Wolfram mentions heart's inconstancy (*Parz.* 1. 1), the counterfeit heart, 'ist dâ daz herze conterfeit, | die lob ich als ich solde' (*Parz.* 3. 12–13), the heart's external roof, (*Parz.* 3. 22), Parzival's fighting heart (*Parz.* 4. 14), and the hearts of women who look upon Parzival.(*Parz.* 4. 20–21). The first instance deals with a heart in doubt or perhaps even untrue (unfaithful both religiously and sexually), and in the second instance we have the inconstancy of Gottfried's Isolde. In the third instance, Wolfram's phrasing amounts to warning against judging on the basis of outward (sexual/physical) appearances: 'dane sol ich varwe prüeven niht, | noch ir herzen dach, daz man siht. | ist si inrehalp der brust bewart' (*Parz.* 3. 21–23) (keeping in mind that *herzen dach* means breasts; compare *Parz.* 111. 4). The fourth reference (to Parzival's heart) amounts to a stock expression. The fifth mention of the heart in the prologue comprises yet another ironic attack on outward appearances: 'er wîbes ougen süeze, | unt dâ bî wîbes herzen suht' (*Parz.* 4. 20–21). (The irony becomes clear when Parzival drives his javolet through Îther's eye.) Taken together these statements provide further indications that the text requires a rejection of inconstancy, especially the kind represented by Gottfried's Isolde (i.e. adultery), and that one should not be drawn in by outward (physical/sexual) appearances. The final coupling of the eye and the heart provides the first instance of a motif (eye/heart) which plays an important role in Wolfram's *Minne* Concept in *Parzival*, *Willehalm*, *Titurel*, and the *Lieder*.

age all the way back to Adam, Wolfram posits Original Sin as the central difficulty confronting his figures. Ultimately, Parzival struggles, not with some blemish on an otherwise faultless character, but with imperfect human nature itself. The crisis, therefore, supersedes the individual fate of the hero. The very formulation of the problematic confounds mythologization or the static quality of the previous romances. Parzival struggles with existential problems that have and will exist as long as humanity persists. The story necessarily unfolds in the larger scheme of salvation history. Time and changes over time disrupt and destabilize all forms of fixed communication. Paronomasia and ambiguum lend themselves well to expressing this kind of fluctuation. The concentration of the crisis on Original Sin posits a difficulty that can never be finally resolved in this world. Parzival's moments of triumph depend upon Divine Grace. The hero never permanently conquers the imperfect human nature.

An awareness of the natural human propensity for both good and evil permeates Wolfram's narrative and language. In this ideological and theological framework, human nature holds great potential for sin, but it can also lead one to God and virtue. The language and structure of the work reflects this duality. Just as the character of each and every human being remains inevitably multivalent, ambiguous, and ever-changing, so too does the meaning of Wolfram's text. The heteroglossic nature of the work reflects the innate mutability of the human psyche. Wolfram orders his presentation of human nature and the meaning of his words according to a soteriological scheme. He situates the various possible meanings in the text according to the stages of salvation history (*ante legem*, *sub lege*, *sub gratia*). Each individual continuously traverses these stages of development in time. In the tale, faith provides the means to attain grace, but it is not a permanent state of being. It requires constant renewal. The possible meanings in Wolfram's romance coexist and refer to each of these stages of development. In this sense, one can discern a soteriological multivalence in the work and soteriological macaronics in the names.

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'Scuro saccio che par lo | meo detto' (I Know that my Word Seems Obscure): Wordplay and Obscurity in Thirteenth-Century Italian Poetry

Paolo Borsa*

Introduction: A False Start

When I was invited to write a chapter for this book on wordplay and etymology, in the first instance I thought that a good subject in Italian literature of the Middle Ages could be the practice of the *interpretatio nominis*, as it is applied in a group of poems by Guittone d'Arezzo (*c*. 1235–1294) and his correspondents. Guittone — who later became 'frate Guittone', when around 1265 he joined the military order of the so-called 'frati gaudenti' — was the leader of the Siculo-Tuscan (or Tusco-Emilian) poets who flourished in Italy after the Sicilian School, initiated by Frederick II (d. 1250).[1] Starting from the assumption that 'the name should proceed from the fact' ('proceder dal fatto il nome dia'), in several sonnets Guittone and his correspondents discuss, both seriously

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[1] On Guittone's biography, see Margueron, *Recherches sur Guittone d'Arezzo* and Cerroni, 'Guittone d'Arezzo'. On the 'frati gaudenti', namely the *milites beate Marie Virginis gloriose*, see Gazzini, '*Fratres* e *milites* tra religione e politica' and Borsa, *La nuova poesia di Guido Guinizelli*, pp. 150–54.

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and jokingly, the consistency between their own names and nature.[2] Those debates all exploit wordplays and etymologies. Guittone thus reconnects his own name to the word *guitto* 'dirty, vile, stingy'; when jurist Ubertino told him that his name reflected his life's conduct, Guittone replied that he was true to his name ('ver [...] guittone') every time he dealt with Ubertino. In another sonnet, Master Bandino says that his friend's name is not truthful; Guittone is, indeed, *leal* 'loyal' and praiseworthy. Guittone recurs to the etymology of his own name also in a sonnet to the poet Onesto da Bologna; while the name of Onesto is 'respected and honoured' (*onesto* meaning 'honest'), Guittone's name is 'vile and shameful'. Still he would not exchange his name with that of his correspondent, for it did not suit Onesto, who was not 'honest' at all. (Guittone probably refers to the fact that in June 1285 Onesto had killed a notary with a bludgeon and was then condemned to death on 24 July.)[3] Another *interpretatio nominis* occurs in a sonnet frate Guittone addressed to his brother Meo Abbracciavacca, where he states that Meo's name is now truthful ('Lo nom'al vero fatt'ha parentado'); because of his lusty life, it seems that sorceresses have bewitched Meo and *le vacche* 'cows' (here probably for 'sluts') have 'embraced' (*abracciato*) him.[4] Similar wordplays and etymologies are also found in contemporary Occitan poetry: Peire Cardenal interprets the name of Raymond VII of Toulouse as *Rai-mon* 'pure ray'; an anonymous troubadour, addressing a *conselh* to Frederick III of Sicily in 1295, explains that his name means *fres de rics* 'curb on the powerful'. In the Occitan corpus even Provence and the adjective Provençal contained a fanciful etymology; around 1246 Guilhem de Montanhagol associates the name of his land to bravery (*Pro-ensa*), while in 1262 Bertran d'Alamanon urges his peers and fellow countrymen to be truly *Pro-en-sal* 'brave in the salt', in order to be able to maintain their control over the Provençal saltpans (and related revenues) threatened by Charles of Anjou's greed.[5]

In all these cases, *interpretatio nominis* is based on quite simple patterns. However, it also shows a certain degree of linguistic freedom. Furthermore, in the Italian examples *interpretatio nominis* is usually embedded in texts marked with a complex, ornate, and sometimes obscure style, rich in figures of sounds

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[2] See sonnets nos 29 (by Mastro Bandino), 208–09 (tenzone with Giudice Ubertino), 230 (to Meo), 234 (to Onesto), in Guittone d'Arezzo, *Le Rime*, ed. by Egidi, pp. 153, 251–52, 262, 264.

[3] Antonelli, 'Nuove su Onesto da Bologna', pp. 12–13.

[4] See Carrai, *La lirica toscana del Duecento*, p. 41.

[5] Borsa, *Poesia e politica nell'Italia di Dante*, pp. 145–46.

(mostly paronomasia), schemes, and tropes that are typical of the Siculo-Tuscan, or rather Guittonian, production. Although complete and detailed, a survey of the *interpretatio nominis* in this group of poems is likely to be, so to speak, literary curiosity. As an individual phenomenon, it must be inscribed in a more comprehensive frame, where to consider and analyze the substance of the free treatment of the vernacular language — of which (para)etymological *interpretatio nominis* is just one manifestation.

Hence, despite my initial intentions, this contribution will *not* be on etymology as *interpretatio nominis*. Taking one step backward, it will focus on wordplay more generally, as one of the most interesting and original traits of thirteenth-century Italian lyric poetry — or at least one of its main, daring, and original streams. My aim is to present to the reader some basic reflections on the way the Tuscan poets of the *Duecento* conceived their compositions in the vernacular, and on the processes of writing and reading, coding and decoding, formatting and copying, to which textual artefacts were subjected by the authors and their public. Furthermore, I will demonstrate the special way in which the Italian vernacular was used to convey meanings, and how Guittone and his followers exploited their mother tongue in their writing, in order to establish a tradition of texts whose essential characters were structurally different from the Latin tradition.

Equivocatio and Meaning: Dante's trobar car *vs* Guittone's trobar clus

In the second book of his unfinished Latin treatise *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante Alighieri explains what a poet in high style should be aware of when using rhyme (II xiii 13).[6] According to Dante, the first inappropriate way is *rithimi repercussio*, namely 'hammering on the same rhyme'. This artifice is allowed only if the poet is seeking to excel in a new and unattempted technique; this is what Dante himself had tried to do in his *sestina doppia Amor, tu vedi ben che questa donna*, one of his *canzoni petrose*. Next, Dante attacks the abuse of *equivocatio* in rhyme position. He defines equivocal rhymes — namely those rhymes in which 'the word is the same, while the meaning changes: e.g., *passo* "step" / *passo* "I pass"'[7] — as *inutilis* 'useless' or 'superfluous', because they always seem

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[6] Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Fenzi, pp. 234–36 (from which I cite); see also Dante Alighieri, 'De vulgari eloquentia', ed. by Tavoni, pp. 1538–44. English translations from Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. and trans. by Botterill.

[7] Kleinhenz, 'Italian Prosody', p. 559.

'to detract to some extent from meaning' ('inutilis equivocatio, que semper sententie quicquam derogare videtur'). Thirdly, Dante criticizes harsh-sounding rhymes, except when they are not mixed with gentle-sounding rhymes. It has been said that in this passage Dante was also condemning some of his own poems, precisely his *canzoni petrose*, which he had composed on the model of, and in competition with, Occitan troubadour Arnaut Daniel, the inventor of the sestina and the leading figure of the precious and artificial *trobar car* (or *prim*, or *ric*).[8] As Tavoni and Fenzi have recently pointed out, in this passage Dante does exactly the contrary: he extolls his harsh, hyper-technical, and over-refined experiments in order to distinguish them from the barren and vain verbal and metrical games that were typical of other Italian poets.[9] Since poetical skills and artifices must be functional to the sense an author wants to convey (*sententia*), harsh-sounding rhymes in Dante's *canzoni petrose* and, more specifically, hammering on the same whole-word rhyme in the sestina *Al poco giorno* (*ombra* : *colli* : *erba* : *verde* : *pietra* : *donna*) and the *sestina doppia Amor, tu vedi ben* (*donna* : *tempo* : *luce* : *freddo* : *pietra*) are far from being 'useless'. In those texts Dante seeks to exploit the full semantic potential of the verbal material he has selected. The semantic field is limited and dense at the same time, with a calculated effect of fixation of the thought on the object of love. The psychological condition of the lover is hard and harsh, just as much as his beloved is as cold and impenetrable as a stone.[10]

In the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante's censure is probably directed to some of the Siculo-Tuscan poets who flourished before the stilnovo generation.[11] As I have already said, their leading figure was Guittone d'Arezzo, a poet Dante

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[8] In the *Commedia* Dante would define Arnaut as one of the greatest artisans — if not the greatest — of the mother tongue: 'miglior fabbro del parlar materno', *Purgatorio* XXVI 117; Dante Alighieri, *Commedia. Purgatorio*, ed. by Inglese, p. 324.

[9] Dante Alighieri, 'De vulgari eloquentia', ed. by Tavoni, pp. 1538–44; Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Fenzi, pp. 235–37.

[10] Dante Alighieri, *Rime*, ed. by De Robertis, pp. 103–19; see also Dante Alighieri, 'Rime', ed. by Giunta, pp. 476–94. The latest comments on *Al poco giorno* and *Amor, tu vedi ben* are by Formisano, 'Al poco giorno ed al gran cerchio d'ombra' and Lazzerini, 'Amor, tu vedi ben che questa donna', respectively. An important dossier on *Al poco giorno* — with contributions by Emilio Pasquini, Rossend Arqués, Enrico Fenzi, Raffaele Pinto, Rosario Scrimieri Martín, and Juan Varela-Portas de Orduña — was published when this article was already in proof: Grupo Tenzone, *Al poco giorno ed al gran cerchio d'ombra*.

[11] On Guittone and the Siculo-Tuscan poets, see Bologna, 'Poesia del Centro e del Nord', pp. 420–50; Carrai, *La lirica toscana del Duecento*, pp. 8–52; and Lannutti, *La letteratura italiana del Duecento*, pp. 36–63.

repeatedly attacked in his work, like Dante's 'father' Guido Guinizelli had done in the ambiguous and mocking sonnet *O caro padre meo, de vostra laude* (which apparently mimed Guittone's style), and his 'first friend' Guido Cavalcanti did in the sonnet *Da più a uno face un sollegismo*.[12] According to *De vulgari eloquentia* II VI 8, Guittone and his followers are praised by 'the devotees of ignorance'; their poetry is considered folksy in both 'vocabulary' and 'construction'. Since the choice of rhymes has strong repercussions on both vocabulary and construction, and therefore on the sense of a poem (*sententia*), we may argue that Dante's censure of inappropriate rhymes was part of his strategy to scrap the peculiar, hermetic style of Guittone and his companions and imitators. As we will see, the extreme pursuit of wordplay and metrical puns, paronomasia and *equivocatio*, and the accumulation of tropes and figures, led Guittone d'Arezzo and some poets of his generation — like Panuccio del Bagno da Pisa and Monte Andrea da Firenze — to the invention of an original, Italian *trobar clus* where the complex and sometimes abstruse wording resulted in a general sense of obscurity. This style, which can be associated with Marcabru's *paraul' escura*, must not be confused with Arnaut Daniel's and Dante's *rimas caras* or, more generally, with the phonetic and rhetoric refinement and density of expression of the *trobar car*.[13] Guittone's *trobar clus* seeks obscurity by complicating the process of decoding the text and distinguishing the units of sense (namely the words) in the scribal continuum. His obscurity is usually a matter of surface: once decoded, his compositions are often quite easily interpreted in their general meaning. The possible obscurity of Dante's *trobar car*, by contrast, works in depth and is the effect of the semantic density of the text — which, instead, is usually quite easy to decode.

In the following pages I will analyze some remarkable examples of the peculiar style of Guittone and his followers. I will start with an easier, albeit impressive, specimen of wordplays, and then I will move to more complex samples. The most daring verbal and prosodic experimentations of Guittone and other

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[12] *Purgatorio* XXVI 97–98: 'il padre | mio' (Dante Alighieri, *Commedia. Purgatorio*, ed. by Inglese, p. 322); *Vita nuova* III 14: 'primo de li miei amici', XXIV 6: 'al mio primo amico', XXV 10 and XXX 3: 'questo mio primo amico' (Dante Alighieri, *Vita nuova*, ed. by Pirovano, pp. 94, 204, 215, and 234). On the tenzone between Guinizelli and Guittone, see Borsa, *La nuova poesia di Guido Guinizelli*, pp. 13–59; see also Steinberg, *Accounting for Dante*, pp. 36–48. On Cavalcanti's sonnet to Guittone, see Rea's comment in Cavalcanti, *Rime*, ed. by Rea, pp. 246–50 (with bibliography), and Pasero, 'Contributi all'interpretazione del sonetto *Da più a uno face un sollegismo* di Guido Cavalcanti'.

[13] On the distinction between *trobar leu*, *trobar clus*, and *trobar car*, see Canettieri, *Il gioco delle forme nella lirica dei trovatori*, pp. 187–204, and Rea, 'Guinizzelli "praised and explained"'.

poets of his generation show an amazing blend of eclectic use of the vernacular language and metrical ties, vocality, and artificiality. On the one hand, the segmentation of the scribal continuum and the graphical agglutination of words on the page often reflect orality, that is, the way syntagmas were pronounced; on the other hand, the visual and syntactic-prosodic structures of those compositions, as Wayne Storey has pointed out, 'lead the reader away from the sonnet's performed acoustics and toward the study of its written and readerly structures'.[14]

Guittone's gioi' *and Giacomo da Lentini's* viso

Guittone's sonnet *Tuttor ch'eo dirò 'gioi', gioiva cosa* is related only in the codex Laurenziano Redi 9 (hereafter L), one of the three major manuscripts of early Italian lyric poetry, along with the Vaticano latino 3793 (V) and the Banco Rari 217, previously Palatino 418 (P).[15] L contains a broad selection of Guittone's letters and poems; the section with his poems, which follows one of the letters, is organized in rhymes composed before and after he joined the 'frati gaudenti'. (In the codex the distinction is marked by the headings, where 'Guittone' is opposed to 'frate Guittone'.)[16] Tinged with sensuality, as many of Guittone's erotic compositions, the sonnet *Tuttor ch'eo dirò 'gioi', gioiva cosa* (L no. 155, fol. 108ᵛ) is a love poem which belongs to Guittone's former, secular production. It is constructed from the *replicatio* of the root *gioi-* and the word *gioi(a)* 'joy', the *senhal* (literally 'sign' in Occitan, i.e. a secret code name) of Guittone's lady.[17]

Here and in the following sonnet, before presenting a modern edition of the poem, I will first provide a photograph of the manuscript representation of the text (Figure 1), as well as a diplomatic transcription of it. I am aware that diplomatic or semi-diplomatic transcriptions are not neutral representations of

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[14] Storey, *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyric*, pp. 46–47.

[15] MS P dates to the end of the thirteenth century; MSS L and V date to the end of the thirteenth century and the early fourteenth century. A complete transcription and a photographic reproduction (along with a volume of studies) of the three great canzonieri are provided by *CLPIO* and *I canzonieri della lirica italiana delle Origini*, ed. by Leonardi, respectively. On the manuscript tradition of early Italian poetry, see Leonardi, 'La poesia delle Origini e del Duecento'.

[16] On Guittone in L, see Leonardi, 'Guittone nel Laurenziano'.

[17] Guittone's poetical corpus is still read in Egidi's edition (Guittone d'Arezzo, *Le Rime*); this sonnet is taken from *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. by Contini, I, 244.
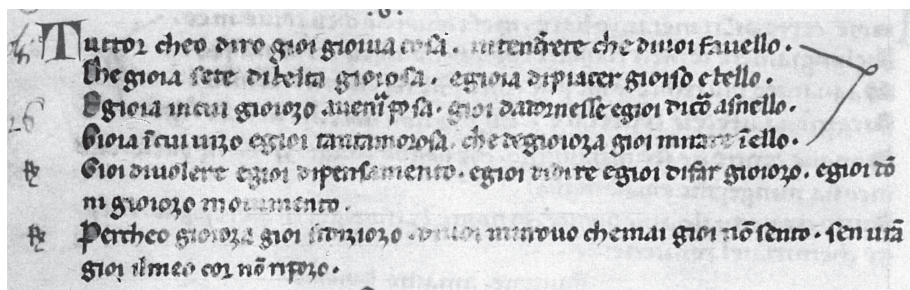
Figure 1. Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Redi 9, fol. 108ᵛ.
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texts: they cannot subrogate the manuscript artefacts; nor can they supersede critical editions, which imply a full assumption of responsibility by their editor. Nonetheless, I think that in the specific case of the poems and the poetical style analyzed in this study, raw transcriptions will help readers perform the task of decoding the texts shown and get a general idea of the *usus scribendi* of the thirteenth-century Italian poetical tradition; these are marked with graphical agglutinations and segmentations of the scribal continuum that are very differ-ent from a modern rendering.[18] An English translation will always follow.

   Tuttor cheo diro gioi gioiva cosa . intend(e)rete che diuoi fauello .
   Chegioia sete dibelta gioiosa . egioia dipiacer gioiso ebello .
   Egioia incui gioiozo aveni(r)posa . gioi dadornesse egioi dico(r) asnello .
   Gioia i(n)cuivizo egioi tantamorosa . chedegioioza gioi mirare i(n)ello .
   ¶ Gioi diuolere egioi dipensamento . egioi didire egioi difar gioiozo . egioi do(n)
   ni gioiozo movimento .
   ¶ Percheo gioioza gioi sidiziozo . diuoi mi trouo chemai gioi no(n)sento . sen u(ost)ra
   gioi ilmeo cor no(n) ripozo .

            Tuttor ch'eo dirò 'gioi'', gioiva cosa,
            intenderete che di voi favello,
            che gioia sete di beltà gioiosa
            e gioia di piacer gioi[o]so e bello,   4
               e gioia in cui gioioso avenir posa,
            gioi' d'adornezze e gioi' di cor asnello,
            gioia in cui viso e gioi' tant'amorosa

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   [18] On the thirteenth-century Italian *usus scribendi*, see Loach Bramanti, 'Il gruppo grafico' and Costantini, *Le unità di scrittura nei canzonieri della lirica italiana delle Origini*. On the production of manuscript books, see Petrucci, 'Il libro manoscritto'.

ched è gioiosa gioi' mirare in ello.   8
   Gioi' di volere e gioi' di pensamento
e gioi' di dire e gioi' di far gioioso
e gioi' d'onni gioioso movimento: 11
   per ch'eo, gioiosa gioi', sì disïoso
di voi mi trovo, che mai gioi' non sento
se 'n vostra gioi' il meo cor non riposo.   14

[Every time I will say 'joy', joyful creature, you will understand that I will be speak-
ing of you, who are joy of joyful beauty and joy of sweet and beautiful pleasure; and
joy on which a joyful future is based, joy of amenities and joy of a slender body [*cor*
< OPr., OFr. *cors*], joy into which I gaze and joy so lovely that beholding it brings
joyful joy. Joy of willing and joy of thinking and joy of saying and joy of joyful doing
and joy of every joyful movement. For, joyful joy, I find myself so eager of you, that
I will never feel joy if I do not rest my heart [*cor*; but the word could also mean
'body': see v. 6] in your joy.][19]

The model for Guittone's use of *replicatio* is probably the sonnet *Eo viso e sono
diviso da lo viso* by *il Notaro* 'the Notary' Giacomo da Lentini (d. *c.* 1260), a lead-
ing figure of the Sicilian School that flourished at the court of Frederick II.[20] In
addition to the use of *replicatio*, Giacomo's sonnet — which, like Guittone's, is
contained only in codex L (no. 375, fol. 137ᵛ; Figure 2) — is also remarkable
for its series of equivocal, derivative, rich, grammatical, and internal rhymes.[21]

[**E**]o uisso eson diuiso dalouiso . ep(er)auisso credo benuisare .
   P(er)odiuiso uiso dalouiso . chaltre louiso chelodiuisare .
   Ep(er) auiso uiso intale uiso . delqualme no(n)posso diuisare .
   Uiso auedere quelle p(er)auiso . chenone altro seno(n) deo d(i)uisare .
¶ Entro auiso ep(er) auiso noe diuiso . chenone altro cheuisare inuiso .
   p(er)omi sforço tuctora uisare .
¶ Credo p(er)auiso cheda uiso . giamai me no(n) posessere diuiso .
   cheluomo uinde possa diuisare .

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[19] On the Gallicism *cor* for 'body' in early Italian poetry, see Zinelli, 'Cuore o corpo? Storia
linguistica di un'immagine'.

[20] The poems of Giacomo da Lentini and of the other poets of the Sicilian School have been
recently edited — by Roberto Antonelli and Costanzo di Girolamo respectively — in vols I and
II of *I Poeti della Scuola siciliana*.

[21] *I Poeti della Scuola siciliana*, I, 477–84. Giacomo da Lentini exploits the *replicatio* of *viso*
also in the sonnet *Lo viso mi fa andare alegramente*: ibid., pp. 471–75.
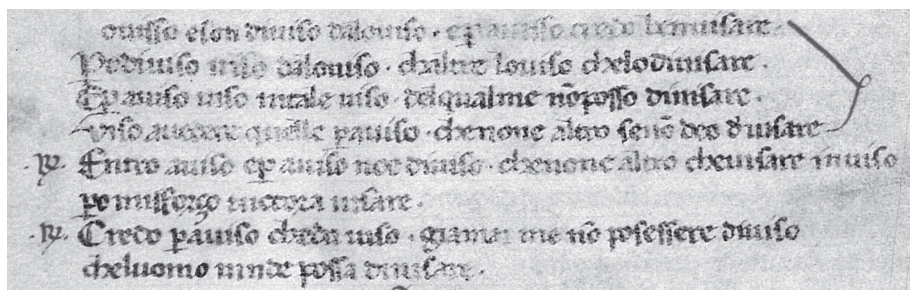
Figure 2. Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Redi 9, fol. 137ᵛ.
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> Eo viso   e son diviso   da lo viso,
> e per aviso   credo ben visare;
> però diviso   'viso'   da lo 'viso',
> c'altr'è lo viso   che lo divisare.   4
>   E per aviso   viso   in tale viso
> de lo qual me non posso divisare:
> viso a vedere quell'è peraviso,
> che no è altro se non Deo divisare.   8
>   Entro a viso   e peraviso   no è diviso,
> che non è altro che visare in viso:
> però mi sforzo tuttor a visare.   11
>   E credo per aviso   che da 'viso'
> giamai me non pos'essere diviso,
> che l'uomo vi 'nde possa divisare.   14

As the poet himself states in v. 3, the word *viso* is equivocal: along with the first-person singular of the verb *visare* 'to watch, to gaze', *viso* indicates the 'face', the 'visage' of the lady (the word derives from Lat. *vīsum* 'sight', then 'look, appearance'), with a distinction being made between her physical appearance as it is *seen* by the poet and her figure as it is *represented* in the poet's memory and imagination. Giacomo's sentence is particularly striking because he was a notary: while distinguishing between the meaning of two homographs and homophones, he is performing one of the tasks required from a professional of the word who deals with the possible ambiguities of the vernacular.[22] I will

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[22] About half a century later, the necessity for notaries to avoid ambiguous forms in the vernacular was highlighted by Bolognese Pietro Boattieri (1260–1334) in his *Expositio in Summa Rolandini*: see Antonelli and Feo, 'La lingua dei notai a Bologna ai tempi di Dante', § I.

return to this issue further ahead, in particular with regard to the fundamental opposition between neat, stable Latin, and elusive, unstable vernacular.

In several passages the peculiar wording of the sonnet allows the reader to test different possibilities of interpreting the words, in order to reach a plausible general understanding. To limit ourselves to the English translation proposed in the following passage, which is based (with slight differences) on the Italian paraphrase proposed by Antonelli,[23] see for instance v. 6, where *‹me›* can be interpreted as *me* 'me' or *me'* 'better' and *‹divisare›* as 'divide/separate' or 'describe':

> I see and yet I am separated from what I have seen [the lady's face], but with certainty I think I see/describe well; thus I distinguish *viso* [the figure I still see even in the lady's absence] from *viso* [her face in a direct view], since the sight is different from describing [in the memory and imagination]. And through my imagination I gaze in such a visage from which I cannot separate myself (*or* that I cannot describe better): watching that sight is a paradise, since it is nothing else but contemplating God. There is no difference between *viso* [what I see/I have seen] and paradise, which is nothing else but gazing at *viso* [the lady's face and God's face as well, with deliberate ambiguity]: that is why I strive to watch constantly. And reasonably I think that I can never be separated from *viso*, whatever one might think.

In Giacomo's sonnet, the use of equivocal rhymes is not just intended to show the poet's virtuosity. It probably aims to reflect the process through which the pleasant figure of the lady, as it is seen by the lover's eyes, is transferred, as an immaterial simulacrum, from the outside to the lover's heart and memory, where it is kept, imagined, and immoderately contemplated and desired. As Andreas Capellanus explains at the beginning of his renowned treatise *De amore*, to which Giacomo himself refers in his sonnet *Amor è uno disio che ven da core*, the passion of love originates from the 'immoderate thinking' (*immoderata cogitatio*) of the mental representation of the beloved.[24] In the lover's experience, this process — which, in the ballata *Veggio negli occhi de la donna mia*, Guido Cavalcanti would represent as a sequence of female appearances deriving one

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[23] *I Poeti della Scuola siciliana*, I, 480.

[24] Andreas Capellanus, *De amore libri tres*, ed. by Trojel, p. 3: 'Amor est passio quaedam innata procedens ex visione et immoderata cogitatione formae alterius sexus' (Love is an inborn passion that proceeds from the sight of and immoderate thinking about the beauty of the other sex). On the medieval, phantasmatic theory of love, see Agamben, *La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale*, pp. 15–35 and 73–155. Giacomo's *Amor è uno disio che ven da core* is the third and last poem of a tenzone with Iacopo Mostacci and Piero della Vigna: *I Poeti della Scuola siciliana*, I, 389–411.

from the other[25] — results in a diffraction of the lady's figure into a multiplicity of similar objects: (1) the figure of the lady seen through the sense of sight outside the subject, who finds it beautiful; (2) the image of the lady passing from the outside to the subject's interiority, through his eyes; and (3) the inner image of the lady represented and reprocessed by the subject's internal sense, in his heart and/or mind. (This last stage of the sensitive apperception is often developed through the topos of the picture of the lady painted in the heart, as in Giacomo's canzone *Meravigliosa-mente*.) The superposition of sacred and profane (see v. 8, 'che no è altro se non Deo divisare'), here susceptible to various interpretations, might be suggested to the poet by the similarity between the practice of contemplating the beloved's phantasmatic image, located in the heart, and the associative practices involved in the religious meditation and the cult of sacred images (e.g. the Veil of the Veronica that Dante would mention in *Vita nuova* XL).[26] In the medieval tradition, the lover can be represented as an idolater, since he fixes his mind pathologically on the contemplation of the inner image of his beloved — which from a Christian point of view is a false image of good.[27] However, in Giacomo's sonnet there is no reference to the sin of idolatry; on the contrary, the lover's state of mind, although he is 'split' (*diviso*) between *viso* and *viso* (the visage of the lady as it has been seen outside, and as it is depicted and behold inside, respectively), is represented — be it truth or illusion — as positive and euphoric.

[25] Cavalcanti, *Rime*, ed. by Rea, pp. 143–45 (vv. 7–12): 'veder mi par de la sua labbia uscire | una sì bella donna, che la mente | comprender no la può, che 'mmantenente | ne nasce un'altra di bellezza nova, | da la qual par ch'una stella si mova | e dica: "La salute tua è apparita"' ('I seem to see issuing from her countenance so beautiful a lady that the mind cannot grasp her, for at once another is born of her of fresh beauty from whom a star seems to come and say: "Your salvation has appeared"': trans. by Nelson, quoted by Ardizzone, *Guido Cavalcanti*, p. 36).

[26] *Vita nuova* XL 1 (Dante Alighieri, *Vita nuova*, ed. by Pirovano, p. 277): 'quella imagine benedetta la quale Geso Cristo lasciò a noi per essemplo de la sua bellissima figura, la quale vede la mia donna gloriosamente' ('the blessed image that Jesus Christ left us as a visible sign of his most beautiful countenance, which my lady beholds in glory', trans. by Musa, *Dante's 'Vita nuova'*, p. 82).

[27] For a concise framing of all these themes and motifs, from Giacomo da Lentini to Dante's *Vita nuova*, see Borsa, 'L'immagine nel cuore e l'immagine nella mente'. On the themes of the beloved's image in the lover's heart and the Veronica / 'vera icona', see Meneghetti, *Storie al muro*, pp. 32–42.

Poetical Skill and Poetics of Obscurity

In Guittone d'Arezzo's work the use (and abuse) of *equivocatio* aims in principle to display the poet's skill and mastery, although it sometimes seems intended to prevent erotic content from becoming obvious and scandalous. Guittone's sonnet *Deporto e gioia nel meo core apporta*, contained in MS L only (no. 201, fol. 114^v; Figure 3), is another example of a composition constructed from *replicatio*. It is marked by the repetition *porta/porto*; more precisely, it is framed around identical rhymes (equivocal and derivative), both in the octave, *porta* : *portato*, and the sestet, *porti* : *portare* : *portara*. Moreover, each line has an internal rhyme, *porta* : *porto* in the octave and *portato* : *porti* : *portar* : *portara* in the sestet.[28]

Deporto egioia nelmeo core apporta . enmi desporta al mal caggio portato .
   Chedeporto saisina aggio edaporta . chentrala porta ove forgie a portato .
   Fe porto tal delei che no(n) trasporta . mame con porta oveo so(n) trasportato .
   Conporto meno(n)fa piu se(n)ma porta . ella du porta sue star diportato .
¶ Conportato demal tanto cheo porti . d(e)po(r)ti opo me fa(n)no atraspo(r)tare . deportare m
   orto veo sonmi portara .
¶ Non comportara caltri mi conporti . nei porti sei sia qual vole apo(r)tare . chedel
   portare teilei madesportara .

              Deporto   e gioia nel meo core apporta,
          e·mmi desporta   al mal ch'aggio portato,
          che de porto   saisina aggio, ed aporta
          ch'entr'a la porta   ov'e' for gie aportato.   4
              Fe' porto   tal de lei che non trasporta,
          ma me comporta   ov'eo son trasportato;
          ch'on porto   me non fa più, se·mm'aporta
          ella, du' porta   su' estar diportato.   8
              Comportat'ho   de mal tanto ch'eo porti:
          deporti   opo me fanno a trasportare
          de portar   morto 'v'eo s'on mi portara.   11
              Non comportara   ch'altri mi comporti
          nei porti,   s'ei sia qual vole a portare,
          ché del portar   mei lei m'adesportara.   14

With twenty-eight set positions, Guittone's sonnet is a veritable metrical feat. Despite the extremely complex wording that suggests — although it does not allow for — multiple possibilities of divisions or unifications of words, the

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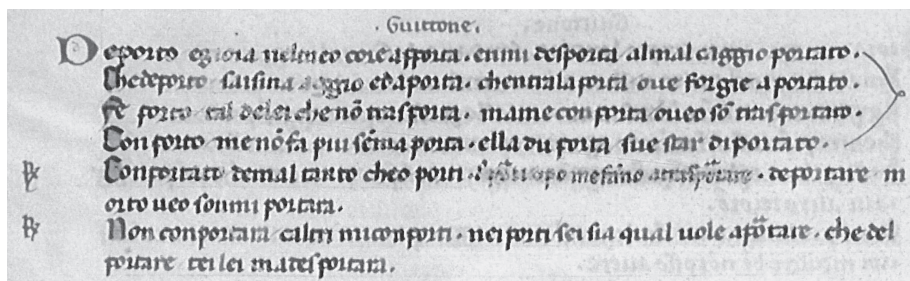[28] *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. by Contini, i, 246–47.

Figure 3. Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Redi 9, fol. 114ᵛ.
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general meaning of the composition, based on a sexual metaphor, is fairly simple. The poet's condition is compared to a quiet harbour (*porto*) and a door (*porta*) through which he can now go; this new situation brings pleasure (*deporto*) and joy (*gioia*) to he who has suffered so much pain until now. The poet is ready to be carried by his lady's will wherever she wants, because she is his source of joy and pleasure; by contrast, the possibility of being subject to the will and whim of anybody else is compared to a metaphorical death. The following translation is based on Pellegrini's laudable effort to decode and interpret the text:[29]

> (The consideration) that I have possession of a port brings pleasure and joy to my heart and moves me away from the pain I have suffered, and this makes that (now) I go through the door out of which I was taken. I have such faith in her that it does not carry me, but it keeps me (of my own accord) where I am carried; for a port is no more suitable to me, if she takes me (elsewhere), where her pleasure takes her. (Until now) I have suffered as much pain as I can suffer: pleasures are necessary to me in order to avoid to land where I (would) go as a dead man if someone brought me (there). I would not suffer that someone else takes me to the ports, whoever is the one that takes me; for this would keep me far from being brought by her.

Guittone's canzone *La gioia mia, che de tutt'altre è sovra*, kept in both MSS L and V (with the *incipit* 'La mia donna'), is another remarkable example of the poet's *trobar clus* and experimentation (L no. 37, fol. 65ᵛ, Figure 4a;

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[29] Quoted by Egidi in Guittone d'Arezzo, *Le Rime*, p. 351; for different solutions, see Minetti, *Sondaggi guittoniani*, pp. 75–77.

V no. 158, fol. 49^{r-v}, Figure 4b). The composition is based on rich rhymes, *sovra* : *sovro* : *sovri* : *sovre*. As the heading *quivoca* suggests in MS L, all the rhymes of the poem are equivocal; the words can be divided in different ways (*sovra/s'ovra, sovro/s'ovro, sovri/s'ovri, sovre/sovr'è/s'ovre*), and in two cases (*sovro-orrat'è* and *sovra-ricca*, vv. 11–12 and 28–29) the rhyme is to be considered a broken rhyme, since the prefix *sovr(a)-* is used to produce the composite form of the absolute superlative, on the model of Occitan *sobre-*. Only the first stanza of five will be quoted; in order to help the reader decode the manuscript transcription and appreciate the medieval *usus scribendi*, the edition provided by Egidi is preceded by the diplomatic transcription from both MSS L and V.[30]

In thirteenth-century Italian manuscripts sonnets are laid out with the octave on four lines, with one couplet per line, and the sestet on two, three, or four lines: with one tercet per line (but sometimes on two lines, due to the necessity of a line shift), or 2+2+2 verses per line (e.g. in MS V), or 2+1+2+1 (e.g. in MS L), or 1+2+1+2 verses per line (e.g. in MS P). Canzoni, on the other hand, are laid out *a mo' di prosa* 'like prose', with just a small dot to delimit the verses and a line shift only at the end of each stanza. On the pages the writing field can be organized both in two columns, like in MS L, or in one single column, like in MSS P or V.

In this canzone, 'la gioia' (v. 1) is once again the *senhal* of Guittone's lady. Verses 3–4 bear a clear statement of poetics, where the author declares that he aims to be obscure.[31]

[L] **L**agioia mia che detuttaltre | soura . ensua lauda uol cheo | troui non souro . desuo pia|cer mifollo adesse souro . la ca(n)son | mia sichaciascun non soura . Gia | diragion pero non credo souri . p(er) | chelongegnio men piacere souri . | ensottil motti ealti dolci soure . de | cio che cherenme suo corte soure

[V] **L**amia donna che ditute altre esoura . emsua lauda uuole chio truoui nomsouro . | delpiaciere suo mafallo adessa souro . lacanzone mia si cha ciaschuno soura Gia | diteragio poi non credo souri . p(er) che lengiengno mio non mi piacie souri . ensotili | motti endolzi ealti soure . dicio chi chere me sua cortte soure .

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[30] Guittone d'Arezzo, *Le Rime*, ed. by Egidi, pp. 27–28.

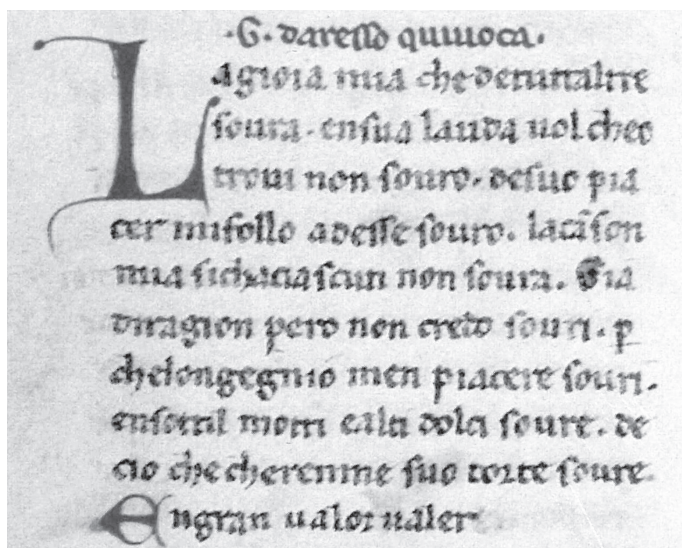[31] Cf. Guittone d'Arezzo, *Le Rime*, ed. by Egidi, pp. 301–03.

Figure 4a. Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Redi 9, fol. 65ᵛ.
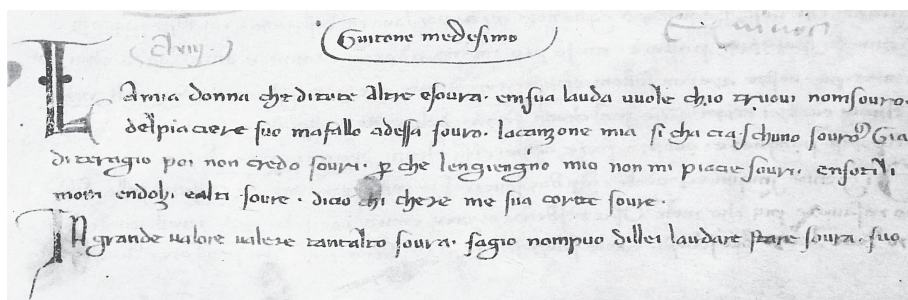By concession of the MiBACT. Further reproduction by any means is forbidden.

Figure 4b. Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 3793, fol. 49ʳ.
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> La gioia mia, che de tutt'altre è sovra,
> en sua lauda vol ch'eo trovi, no 'n sovro
> de suo piacer; ma fallo ad essa, s'ovro
> la canzon mia, sí ch'a ciascuno s'ovra.
>   Già di ragion però non credo s'ovri,   4
> per che l'engegno m'è 'n piacere s'ovri
> en sottil motti e 'n dolzi e alti, sovre
> de ciò che chereme sua corte s'ovre.   8

[My joy, that is above all others, wants me to write verse in her praise, not more than she likes; but I am defective to her, if I open my song, in such a way that it is open to anyone. In this way I do not think that one acts reasonably; therefore I am pleased that my mind exerts itself in subtle, sweet, and deep wordings, about that which her gentle command demands from me.]

In its modern rendering, the interpretation of the text is entrusted to the editor: the standardized spelling (especially in the presence of homographic forms, as in this case) has already solved much of the puzzle. Furthermore, the normalized edition tends to 'conceal a visual ambiguity presented in early manuscript forms of the original poem'.[32] By contrast, in the medieval transcription the interpretation of the text is left to individual readers, who are required to try different possibilities on the level of both lexical individuations and syntactic solutions. In a case like this, readers — especially if the poem ever provided a public of *listeners* — are also asked to assign different phonetic renderings to homographs: in the Tuscan vernacular, the tonic vowels *ò* of the forms of the verb *ovrare* (< Lat. *ŏpĕrāri*) are open [ɔ], whereas the tonic vowels *ó* of both the adverbial forms derived from Lat. *sŭpra* (*sovr-*) and the verbal forms moulded on OFr. *ouvrir* (see also OPr. *obrir*) are closed [o].

An analogue and even clearer statement of poetics is contained in the first *congedo* of Guittone's canzone *Tuttor, s'eo veglio o dormo*, copied in MSS P, L, V (P no. 3, fols 2ᵛ–3ʳ; L no. 35, fols 64ᵛ–65ʳ; V no. 141, fol. 43ʳ), and in MS Vaticano Barberiniano 3953. Here my discussion focuses on MS P. Its beautiful illustration representing the poet will be shown (Figures 5a and 5b), followed by the transcription of the verses as they can be read in P, a modern edition by Contini, and my paraphrase.[33] In this poem Guittone again recurs to rich and equivocal rhymes, among which the composed rhyme *par lo* : *parlo* (vv. 61–62). The poet explains which style he has chosen and which public he is

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[32] Storey, *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyric*, p. 71.

[33] *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. by Contini, I, 197–99.
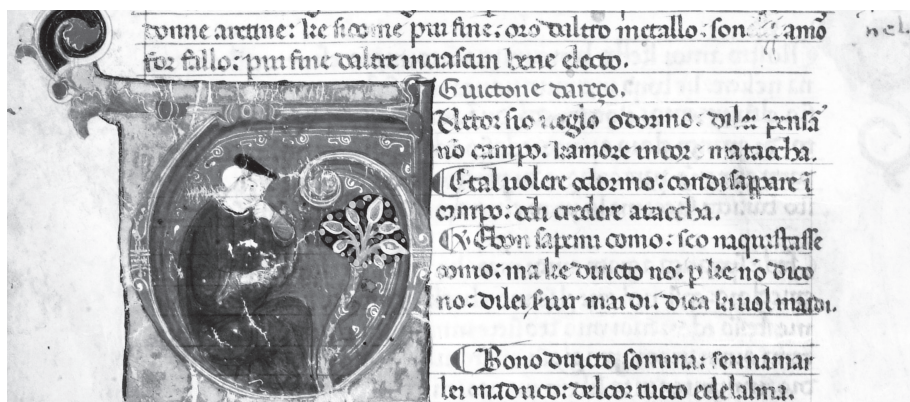
Figure 5a. Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Banco Rari 217, fol. 2ᵛ.
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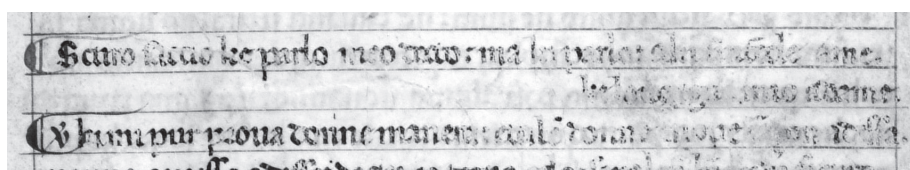
Figure 5b. Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Banco Rari 217, fol. 3ʳ.
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addressing. His manner is intentionally obscure: on the one hand, his mind and cleverness allow him to do so; on the other hand, he wants to do so because the public he is speaking to is composed of authentic lovers and initiates, who will be able to understand the poet's message, foreclosed to others.[34] Along with the first congedo, I will cite the first stanza of the canzone; readers will thus be able to get a taste of the complex scheme of identity rhymes interwoven by Guittone, and test the complexity and effectiveness of his *trobar clus*.

Tuttor sio ueglo odormo . dilei pensa(r) | no(n) campo . kamore incor mataccha . | Etal uolere odormo . condisappare i(n) | campo . odi credere ataccha .

❡ Ebon sapemi como . seo naquistasse | como . ma ke diricto no . p(er)ke no(n) dico | no . dilei s(er)uir | maidi . dica kiuol maidi .

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[34] On the congedo (or tornata) of this poem, and the relation Guittone established with Marcabru's *paraul'escura*, see Leonardi's remarks in his *Introduzione* to Guittone d'Arezzo, *Canzoniere*, pp. xix–xxi.

❡ Scuro saccio ke parlo meo decto . ma ki parlo . aki sintende ame . | ke longegno
mio dame .

❡ kimipur proua donne . manera etale(n)donne ...

      Tuttor, s'eo veglio o dormo,
di lei pensar non campo,
ch' Amor en cor m'atacca.
E tal voler ho d'òr mo,
com' di sappar in campo
o di creder a tacca.   6

      E bon sapemi, como
eo n'acquistasse Como;
ma' che diritto n'ò,
perch'eo non dico no
di lei servir mai dì,
dica chi vol: 'Maidì!'   12

      [...]

      Scuro saccio che par lo   61
mio detto, ma' che parlo
a chi s'entend' ed ame:
ché lo 'ngegno mio dàme
ch'i' me pur provi d'onne
mainera, e talento ònne.   66

[Whether I am awake or asleep, I never escape from thinking of her, for Love binds
me in my heart. And I am now so eager for gold, as I am for hoeing in a field or giv-
ing credit. And yet I like it, as if I acquired Como; for I have the right to it, since at
no time I ever refuse to serve her — may whoever so wishes say 'Help me God!'. [...]

I know that my word seems obscure, because I speak to the ones who are experts on
love: for my mind allows me to attempt any matter, and I am willing to do that.]

Here again the readers get no explanation on how they should decode and
interpret the text: they must establish a meaning by testing different possibili-
ties of dividing the words. Sometimes the process of decoding requires brainy
solutions leading to the discovering of convoluted forms, as for *dormo* 'I sleep'
vs *d'or mo* 'of gold now';[35] other times the reader must recognize the use of

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[35] Or also *a chi, se 'ntend' e', ame* 'to those who appreciate, if they understand', as proposed
for v. 63 by Costantini, *Le unità di scrittura nei canzonieri della lirica italiana delle Origini*,
pp. 172–73.

uncommon, literary forms, like the Gallicism *Maidì* 'Help me God'; still other times the easiest solution is not the best one, as in the cases of the scribal segments ‹dame› and ‹donne›, placed in rhyme position in the *congedo*, where they should not be interpreted (although they could be, with a different scanning of words!) as *dame* 'dames' and *donne* 'ladies'.

Wordplay and Visual Poetics: Panuccio, Monte, Guittone

Panuccio del Bagno da Pisa is one of the main followers of Guittone's manner. In his sonnet *Amor s'ha il mio voler miso di sovra*, contained in MS V (no. 305b, fol. 98ᵛ; Figure 6), Panuccio refers to the 'Guittonian' tradition by exploiting the rich and equivocal rhymes *sovra*, *sovro*, and *porto* that we have found in Guittone's poems, to which *diviso*, *parte*, and *regna* are added, here with an amazing metrical and technical surplus. Thus in the octave each couplet ends with the same rhyme *diviso*, while the rhymes *sovra* and *sovro* at the end of odd lines are immediately replicated at the beginning of even lines, as identical and internal rhymes; in the sestet both tercets end with the same rhyme *regna*, while the rhymes *porto* and *parte* close and open the first/second and second/third lines of each tercet, respectively.

> Amor s'à *a*l meo voler miso di sovra;
> s'ovra   non falla, già mai non divizo
> che·ssua virtù da me sia punto sovra,
> s'ovra   sì forte lo parer di vizo;   4
>   e l'alma à vinta ognor, s'e' poso o s'ovro:
> sovro   è da me, non mai punto è divizo.
> Tucto non [so] com'elli è tanto sovro,
> sovro   da me à stenensa, etia[m] divizo.   8
>   E quella amore in me che tanto porto,
> porto   è d'onne virtù, non sol di parte:
> parte   da cui non mai lei tanto regna: 11
>   in che pensando, benenanza porto;
> pòrto   sentir da lei m'è d'onne parte
> parte   di ben di sé vero in cui regna.   14

In MS V, the extraordinary *mise en texte* and *mise en page* of the sonnet, which is an *unicum* in the Italian thirteenth-century lyric tradition,[36] is meant to high-

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[36] This *mise en texte* and *mise en page* could go back to the author but, as Storey points out, could also be the result of the copyist's 'own analysis and graphological reinterpretation of the sonnet' (Storey, *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyric*, p. 33). For a
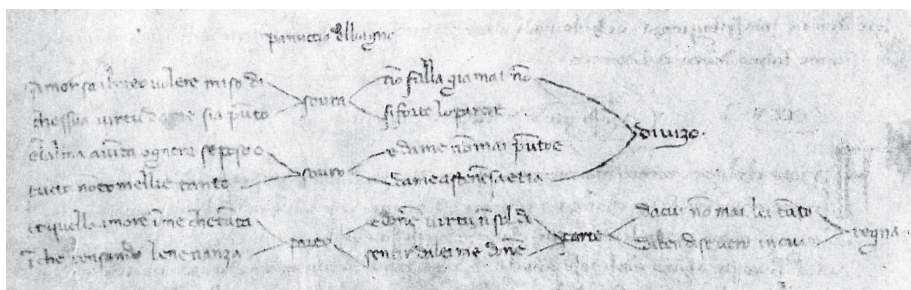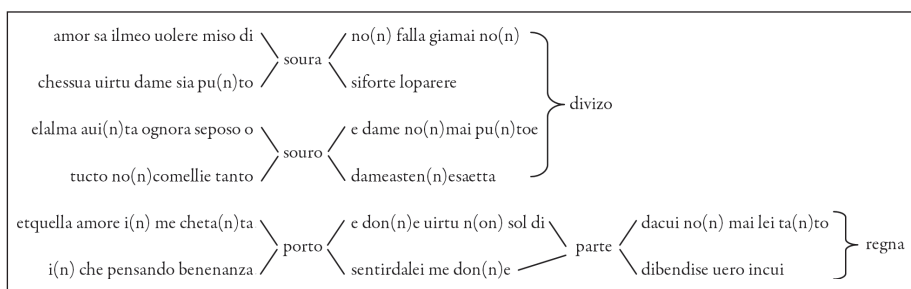
Figure 6. Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 3793, fol. 98ᵛ.
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light the peculiar and daring metrical structure conceived by Panuccio. The internal, shared rhyme words that are emphasized by four diagonal lines (*sovra*, *sovro*, *porto*, *parte*) must be added to both the lines before and after, in order to complete each metrical unity, while the two words on the right extremity, emphasized by two diagonal lines (*diviso* and *regna*), respectively complete the four couplets of the octave and the two tercets that compose the sestet. Along with a modern presentation of the text, I think that a critical edition of the sonnet should also display a picture of the manuscript, in order to illustrate this extraordinary example of visual poetry, and perhaps also a diplomatic transcription like the one that I have proposed above (although, as I have already said, a diplomatic transcription is not to be considered a fully neutral operation). These would help the reader appreciate the way the poet contrived his composition, playing with words and equivocal semantic values and thinking of the 'abstract' structure of the sonnet, that is, not as a sequence of fourteen lines of

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later example of 'graphic isolation' of the rhymes in the Latin tradition, see the transcription of the goliardic strophes of the poem *Vehementi nimium commotus dolore*, ascribed to Petrus de Vinea, in Montpellier, École de médecine, MS 351, fols 25ᵇ–26ᵛ: Montefusco, 'Petri de Vinea *Vehementi nimium commotus dolore*', pp. 308 and 363 (description and table).

hendecasyllables, as we do nowadays, but as an octave, composed of four couplets of hendecasyllables arranged in four lines, and a sestet, composed of two tercets arranged on two transcriptional lines.[37] Paraphrasing the text is particularly hard in this case, since many possibilities of word division and attribution of meaning must be tested, and are possible for adoption in multiple combinations. The paraphrase that follows is based on the interpretation of the text provided by Brambilla Ageno, the editor of the most reliable scholarly edition of Panuccio's poems (from which the sonnet has been cited).[38]

> Love has overwhelmed my will; if the work does not fail, I do not think that its virtue can ever be exceeded by me, since the appearing of a look works so strongly; and it keeps my soul subjugated evermore, whenever I rest or work: it is far from me, (and yet) it is by no means ever separated from me. Although I do not know how it is so superior, it has dominion over me, even from a distance. And the love[39] that I hold in me, and is so great, is the port of every virtue, not just of a part of them: it departs from the one who does not live for that (love) only: and thinking of this, I feel joy; from every part it is accorded to me by that (love) that I feel a part of its real good, in which it consists.[40]

Another master of Italian thirteenth-century *trobar clus* was the Florentine poet Monte Andrea, who produced a large number of compositions marked by semantic equivocation, dense wordplay, and obscurity. In Monte's work, the most complex and daring poem — which is one of the most elaborated technical and metrical achievements of early Italian poetry — is probably the extended sonnet *Coralment' ò me stesso 'n ira*, the seventeenth and last sonnet of a political tenzone on the Italian military campaign of Charles of Anjou, 1265–66.[41] The poetic correspondence is related only in MS V ('tenzone XVII': nos 882–98, fols 167ʳ–168ᵛ): it involves Monte Andrea (who in the first sonnet mentions Pallamidesse, another Florentine poet), ser Cione, ser Beroardo,

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[37] On this sonnet, see Storey, *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyric*, pp. 33–37.

[38] Panuccio del Bagno, *Le Rime*, ed. by Ageno, pp. 29–30. On the edition of Panuccio's poems, see Panizza, *Verso una nuova edizione di Panuccio del Bagno*.

[39] The feminine *quella amore* (to which Panuccio refers twice as *lei*) is a Gallicism, like *divizo* 'I think', *regna* '(she) lives', *benenanza* 'well-being, joy', etc.

[40] In the last verse the division *part'è* is also possible: 'part'è di ben di sé vero in cui regna'. In this case the verse could be interpreted as 'in the one where it (love) reigns there is a part of its (love's) real good'. I am grateful to Fabio Zinelli for this suggestion.

[41] On Monte's political tenzoni, see Robin, 'Espoirs gibelins au lendemain de Bénévent' and Borsa, *Poesia e politica nell'Italia di Dante*, passim.

Federigo Gualterotti, Chiaro Davanzati, and messer Lambertuccio Frescobaldi. Monte's sonnet (V no. 898, fol. 168ᵛ; Figure 7) shows his typical expansion of the octave from eight to ten verses, the so-called *modificazione di Monte Andrea*, with the addition of a couplet to the octave (8+2 verses). A twenty-five-verse *sonetto rinterzato*, in which seven-syllable verses are inserted between the hendecasyllables of each couplet of the octave (10+5 verses) and between the hendecasyllables of both tercets of the sestet (6+4 verses), Monte bases his sonnet on the repetition of the identical rhymes in ‹*cappo*› and ‹*aqua*›. The operation of visually decoding the text, which breaks down in its oral performance, is extremely hard because of the complex and abstruse wording, and because of the dense network of broken rhymes.[42] In his ground-breaking study, Storey observes that in *Coralment' ò me stesso 'n ira* the 'merging of the traditional successivity of poetry's oral presentation with the simultaneous geometries of the poetic document's purely visual dimensions (e.g. the broken rhyme arranged as a visual phenomenon in the document itself) results in a mixing of the visual and semantic codes which might at first seem difficult to reconcile in a scribal tradition used to the simple documentation of poetic performance'.[43]

The reference edition for Monte Andrea is Minetti's edition, from which I cite and to which I refer for a possible interpretation.[44]

Coralmento mestessonira cappo. rgo. atalmio dire cappo. co. misaria mortte sine s-cappo. chesuariato etutto cio cappo. rtta. edancortuto cio cappo. dere. uerasentenza nonua cappo. fordirasgioni lequistioni cappo. ne. sono corette cappo. niscie. se stesso talfa jn cappo. ancora delsuo maestro dico cappo. fare. chesegue cappo. rtto. mençongne tali oue noascappo. chelodire ditali dico cappo. sanza. iloco cappo. gire. conciaschuno folle sonne cappo.
¶ Edio aprouo p(er) ciertto che aqua. nte. sentenze e aqua. li. me portte sono efiaro aqua. lora. sono aqua. ntan(n)o conoscienza colppi come naqua.
¶ Mali colppi mortali fiaro aqua. ndo. giungneraqua. lagiente checontra carllo fera aqua. tora lauita laqua. ntita. sia asai chedicie pur daqua.

[42] On Monte's style, see Capovilla, *Dante e i 'pre-danteschi'*, pp. 23–27. For definitions and examples of 'technical rhymes', see Beltrami, *La metrica italiana*, pp. 190–94, and Menichetti, *Metrica italiana*, pp. 549–51 (broken rhyme), 562–66 (compound rhyme), and 572–78 (equivocal rhyme). See also Avalle's Introduction to *CLPIO*, pp. cclxii–cclxiii.

[43] Storey, *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyric*, p. 96.

[44] Monte Andrea da Fiorenza, *Le Rime*, ed. by Minetti, pp. 265–66. At this point it is easy to notice how much a modern rendering of the poem, formatted line by line, conceals the visual ambiguity and wordplay present in the early manuscript form. The best modern representation of the sonnet is, in my opinion, the one proposed by Storey, *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyric*, pp. 90–91, who has effectively reproduced the poem in its nine-line presentation.
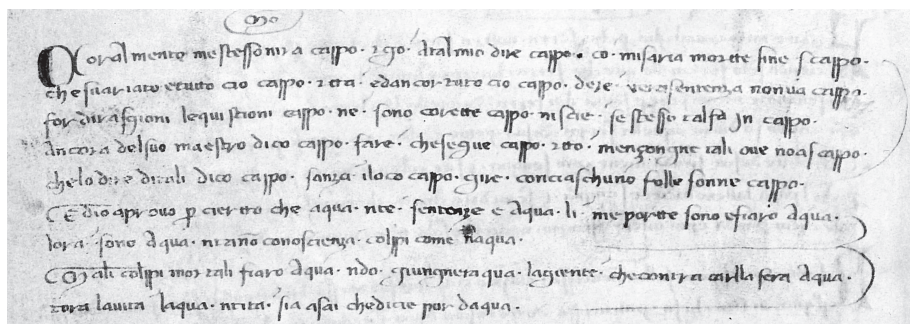
Figure 7. Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 3793, fol. 168ᵛ.
© 2018 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

     Coralment' ò me stesso 'n ira, cappo-
-rgo, a tal, mio dire, ca ppo-
-co mi· saria morte, s' i' ne cappo!
Ché svariato è tutto ciò c' appo-
-rta, e ancor tuto ciò c' à '· ppo-
dere: vera sentenza non v' acappo!　　　　　6
    Fòr di rasgioni, le quistioni c' appo-
-ne, sono cor[r]ette: ca ppo-
-nisce se stesso, tal[e] fa incappo!
Ancor del suo maestro, dico, ca ppò
fare, ch' e' segue c' à ppo-
-rto menzogne tali ove no à scappo?　　　　　12
    Ché, lo dire di tali, dico c' à ppo-
-s[s]anza i[n] loco ca ppò
gire con ciascun folle, s' òn-ne cappo!　　　　　15
    Ed io aprovo per certo che, a[h], qua-
-nte sentenze, e, a[h], qua-
-li me porte sono (e fiaro, a[h] qua-
-l', ora!) sono, a qua-
-nt' àn conoscenza, colpi come 'n aqua.　　　　　20
    Ma li colpi mortali fiaro, a[h], qua-
-ndo giungnerà [a] qua
la gente ch' è contra Carllo fera; a' qua'
tor[r]à la vita! La qua-
-ntità sia asai, ch' e' dice: 'Pur da' qua!'　　　　　25

[I hate myself deeply, since I address my words to such an individual that I would pre-
fer to face death instead, if only I could escape from him. In fact all that he reports,

as well as all that he has at his disposal, is abnormal: nothing of it makes sense to me! The objections he moves are clearly unreasonable (*lit*. are correct outside of reason). He hoods himself so well that he falls on his sword (*lit*. he punishes himself). Furthermore, I will say, what can he do with his master, since it resulted that he had proffered such lies from which it is hard to disentangle? For I say that the words of men like this have power only when they stay with the fool, provided they can find one. And I consider certain that, oh!, all the many discourses that will be proffered to me, whatever their quality be (and, oh!, which will it be now!) will be dead in the water for those who are sage. But deadly blows await the people who will come here with a fierce attitude towards Charles [of Anjou]: he will take their lives. The quantity of the blows will be huge, for he says 'Come here, do not spare yourself!']

Lastly, a borderline case of Guittone's pursuit of obscurity is the sonnet *A fare meo porto*, contained in manuscript V (no. 449, fol. 123ʳ; Figure 8). The poem stands out for its extreme equivocalness: in the octave, the first couplet (vv. 1–2) is identical to the second (vv. 3–4), while the third couplet (vv. 5–6) is identical to the fourth (vv. 7–8); in the sestet, the first tercet (vv. 9–11) is identical to the second (vv. 12–14), although the way the tercets were copied, namely on three lines of two couplets, does not allow for immediate realization of their visual identity. The poem, which is a sexual vaunt, is a true tour de force: the process of decoding the text, by dividing the *continuum* of letters into single units of sense, can lead — as Roberto Antonelli pointed out — to multiple, albeit not infinite, possibilities, due also to the presence of a high number of interdependent variants.[45] Following the diplomatic transcription, I propose the solution devised by Antonelli which, not presenting *repetitiones* (the repetition of the same word with the same meaning), perfectly matches the criterion of *equivocatio* (the word is the same, while the meaning changes).

> **A** fare meo portto cante partte cheo . adire sagio conto coma pare .
> afare meo portto cante partte cheo . adire sagio conto coma pare .
> amore digioia che fatto mi deo . contare esto core pienosi damare .
> amore digioia che fatto mi deo . contare esto core pienosi damare .
> ¶ penetro che modo can aportto . coragio mando dipresgione sofrango .
> amanie ofero amante orestei lasso . penetro che modo can aporto .
> coragio mando dipresgione sofrango . amanie ofero amante orestei lasso .

---

[45] Antonelli, 'Metrica e testo', pp. 57–66. On this sonnet, see also Minetti, *Sondaggi guittoniani*, pp. 74 and 95; Avalle, 'Un "vanto" di Guittone'; and *CLPIO*, pp. lxxix–lxxxi. On the history of the interpretation of Guittone's sonnet, his style, and technical hypertrophy, see Carrai, *La lirica toscana del Duecento*, pp. 33–36 (and now also Lannutti, *La letteratura italiana del Duecento*, pp. 40–42).
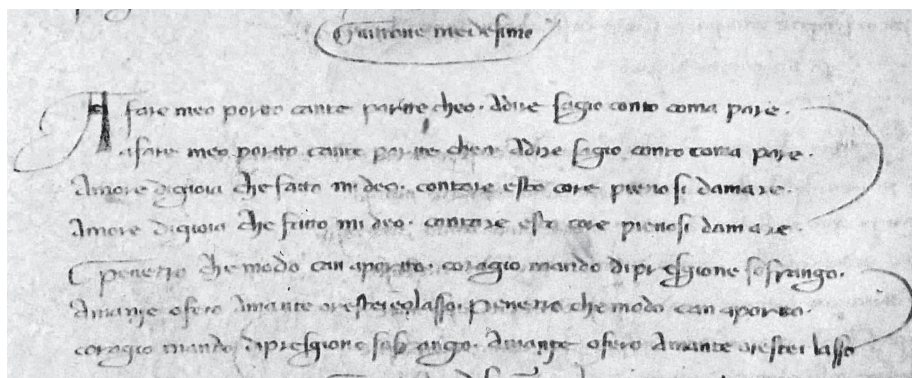
Figure 8. Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 3793, fol. 123ʳ.
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> A fare m'è oporto cant'e·parte ch'eo
> a dire s'aggio conto, com'apare,
> a fare meo porto, cante part'è, cheo:
> a! dir e' saggio conto, co' m'apare!
>   Amore, di gioia ch'è fatto, mi déo
> contare, esto core pien ò sì d'amare:
> a! mor' e' di gioia, che fatt'ò mi' dèo:
> con ta·re estò, c'ore pieno sì d'amar è.
>   Penétro, ch'è modo ca n'aportò
> cor a gio' 'mand', o di presgione sofrango!
> a! mai eo, fero amante, ò rest'e i lasso:
>   penetrò, ché mod'ò can aport'ò
> c'or aggio: ma 'nd'ò di pregio, ·ne so, frango:
> amai e o' fero a mante or estei lasso.

[I need to compose a song on a part [namely Guittone's beloved or her sex] that, if I have to say it clearly, as it is, I long to make my harbour in all the parts that it has: ah!, I think it is sage to say how much I like it! I have to describe love, which is made by joy, since this heart of mine is so full of love: ah!, it dies for joy [*Gioi(a)* is the *senhal* of Guittone's beloved], which I have made my god. I am with such a guilty one [that is, Guittone's heart or sex], which is now so full of love. I penetrate, for this is the way provided by the heart [or the body: see p. 144] to love my joy, or I fail because of the prison [where the beloved or her sex is restrained]! Ah!, being a fierce lover, I never find quiet or rest: it penetrated, for I have that chance when I am welcome as I am now: but I know that I break as soon as I get the prize: I loved and, where I (was) fierce, I remained exhausted for many hours.]

Ultimately, any attempt to decode and interpret univocally this sonnet results in just one of multiple possibilities. Dividing or unifying the textual strings, introducing punctuation and diacritics according to modern grammatical rules, presenting the composition verse by verse according to our present conception of poetry: all this radically modifies the text as it was conceived and realized by the author, and then reproduced by the copyist. Guittone sought ambiguity and obscurity by exploiting the *usus scribendi*; as for the compositions we have analysed before, most of the semantic potential of his sonnet relies on its *mise en texte* and *mise en page*, and gets partly — and sometimes irremediably — lost once the text adopts a modern rendering. As a paradox, we could say that the meaning of this sonnet, as well as that of other poems composed in the same way, *is* its original (or, at least, its ancient) form.[46]

Wordplay, Orality, and Artificiality: Latin Tradition vs Vernacular Culture

Thanks also to the invention and the establishment of print, the way we write and conceive the language we speak is now grammatical and, so to say, analytic; in writing we distinguish the units of sense, namely the words and their grammatical functions, and we emphasize syntactic relations. One theory of the thirteenth-century *usus scribendi* of copyists transcribing Italian lyric poetry — a relatively new writing and linguistic system in comparison to the transcriptional system for Latin[47] — was based on a vocal and synthetic conception of the tongue: copyists tended not to segment the text into single words, clearly distinguishing their grammatical functions, nor did they adopt regular and stable forms for the words they recorded. A coherent grammatical system in the vernacular simply did not exist, nor did a common literary language adopted by all — like the language Dante sought in the *De vulgari eloquentia* among the multiplicity of Italian dialects: a language grounded in stability and with rules, on the model of Latin *gramatica*. The words were usually recorded on the page and agglutinated, or grouped together, in 'clumps' of letters, in a way that somehow reflected oral performance or execution of the grouped syllables. Writers

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[46] I suspect that the copyist of V did not reproduce the original *mise en page* of *A fare meo porto*, which probably provided that the sestet be written in two lines in order to highlight the visual identity of the two tercets that compose it.

[47] See Costantini, *Le unità di scrittura nei canzonieri della lirica italiana delle Origini*, pp. 20–21.

were prone to merge in one scribal unit contiguous words that were pronounced seamlessly, often registering elisions, apocopes, apheresis, phonosyntactic consonantal geminations, phonosyntactic assimilations, euphonies, and so on, in a system devoid of case flexions where, unlike Latin, it could sometimes be difficult to understand where one word ended and another began. The 'obscurity of the vernaculars' of which Francesco da Barberino speaks in the *Prohemium* to his Latin *glossae* to the *Documenti d'amore* is likely to be the consequence of these features, combined with a lower degree of intellectualization as opposed to Latin.[48]

The lack of a standard literary language, and the writers' attention to vocalization, allowed poets like Guittone, Panuccio, and Monte, on the one hand, to utilize and imitate linguistic materials taken from contiguous and concurrent literary systems (in particular the French and Occitan, as well as the Latin, traditions); on the other hand, to exploit the variety of Tuscan idioms, resorting to verbal forms that could vary depending on the contingent expressive necessities.[49] To recall the terms used by Dante in *De vulgari eloquentia* II iv 3, their linguistic system was governed by usage or even by chance (*casu*), rather than being regulated by a set of rules (*arte*), as it was for Latin — a language that Dante considered artificial — or as it would have been in the presence of an illustrious and courtly vernacular language, acknowledged by all Italian literati as a binding model. Accusing Guittone and other Siculo-Tuscan poets of being 'municipal', Dante was reacting not only to the decidedly urban and thus limited components of their linguistic usage, but also against their linguistic eclecticism in word choice and thematic associations, which drew on sources that were not literary.[50]

In a modern setting, wordplay is in principle a matter of sound, not of script. However, such a dividing line is difficult to establish in manuscript culture, especially in the vernacular. Equivocal compositions and puzzle poems, like the ones

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[48] 'Et cum de circumspectionis consilio presentes glosas intenderem per librum totum extendere, visum est clarius ut adaptate latino vicine magis sint ille, quam[vis] etiam aliquando super obscuritatem vulgarium extendatur': Francesco da Barberino, *I Documenti d'Amore*, ed. by Albertazzi, II, 26. I owe this suggestion to Antonio Montefusco, whose study on vulgarizations and Latin versions of original vernacular texts is forthcoming.

[49] See Carrai's linguistic remarks on the language and prosody of Guittone and other poets of his generation in Carrai and Inglese, *La letteratura italiana del Medioevo*, pp. 49–50. On Gallicisms in the Italian literature of the Origins, see Cella, *I gallicismi nei testi dell'italiano antico*.

[50] On Dante's reaction to Guittone's linguistic eclecticism, see Manni, *La lingua di Dante*, p. 47.

we have analysed in these pages, are complex literary artifacts: their extraordinary artificiality is the result of the extreme exploitation of the freedom allowed to writers in the vernacular, regarded as a natural language that evades strict rules and regulations, and the distance of copyists transcribing these complex works ten to thirty years after they were composed. The producers and users of those literary artefacts belonged to the same social and cultural milieu. They were merchants, bankers, public officers, rhetoricians, physicians, notaries, jurists: a group that was gaining preeminence in the Italian city-states at the expense of the aristocratic-military class, and that was distinguished by the expertise in, and familiarity with, public speaking, reading, and writing. A few years later, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, in the *De vulgari eloquentia* and the *Convivio*, Dante would try to establish the vernacular as an alternative form of expression to Latin ('This shall be a new light, a new sun which shall rise where the old sun shall set').[51] This shift would imply a process of appropriating some traits of the *gramatica* (Latin), in particular its stability and intellectual *formulae*, traits not shared by the vernacular of the Siculo-Tuscan poets.

Exploiting a kind of wordplay and obscurity that were not allowed in Latin, Guittone and his followers invented and supported a peculiar literary tradition: one which had few, if any, equals in the romance domain, and which followed its own rules, in the way that linguistic signs were used and meaning was conveyed.

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[51] *Convivio* I xiii 12 (Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. by Fioravanti, p. 186): 'Questo sarà luce nuova, sole nuovo, lo quale surgerà là dove l'usato tramonterà, e darà lume a coloro che sono in tenebre ed in oscuritade, per lo usato sole che a loro non luce' ('This shall be a new light, a new sun which shall rise where the old sun shall set and which shall give light to those who lie in shadows and in darkness because the old sun no longer sheds its light upon them', trans. by Lansing).

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Etymology, Wordplay, and Allegorical Reading in Some Medieval Irish Texts

Jan Erik Rekdal

Traditionally, Irish scholars of philology have tended to discard the medieval commentary tradition, the glosses, as unreliable and senseless guesswork due to a limited understanding of the texts the glossators glossed.[1] On the other hand, there was a great regard for the linguistic value of the older ones. Although much of the gloss-material consists of paraphrases in which one has tried to elucidate the main text, most of the glosses are lexical. I follow previous scholars commenting on the glosses[2] in dividing these lexical glosses roughly into (1) explanatory glosses which give a semantic equivalent of a word and (2) etymological glosses which 'in the highly imaginative fashion familiar to readers of early Irish literature offer derivations of individual lexical items, usually incorrect from the "scientific" etymology, and usually accompanied by one or more alternative derivations'.[3] It is because the glosses

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[1] See, for instance, Davies, 'Protocols of Reading in Early Irish Literature', p. 11.

[2] Russell, 'The Sounds of a Silence', pp. 16–30, and Davies, 'Protocols of Reading in Early Irish Literature', p. 10.

[3] Davies, 'Protocols of Reading in Early Irish Literature', p. 10.

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come up with explanations that are incorrect according to the views of modern philology that many a great scholar of the previous generations of philologists dismissed them as humbug.[4] The most severe criticism, though, came from scholarship dealing with Old Irish law for which the medieval commentators applied the same technique or analysis, expressed clearly by Daniel Binchy.[5] The 'pseudo-etymological' analysis is given the prefix 'pseudo' by modern scholarship as we find it hard to accommodate it within our definition of etymology. As has been demonstrated by Davies, the glossing tradition reflects an awareness of polysemy and the fact that not only do we have homonymy in which different lexemes have the same sound or form, but also polysemy where the same lexeme has different meanings, and it is difficult to draw a sharp line between the two. This awareness seems to permeate a great majority of the texts extant from the medieval Irish tradition until quite late, much more than hitherto acknowledged.

This technique is in the medieval Irish tradition called *bélrae n-etarscartha* (divided/decomposed language),[6] implying a dividing of words into their constituent parts to reach a 'fuller' meaning. This 'fuller' meaning accords with the medieval idea of polysemy underlying for instance the exegetical reading of texts referred to as typological (figural) interpretation. Such interpretations collide with the modern ideal of one single meaning and quite understandably resulted in dismissals of the type mentioned above. The explanation of words, however, may yield more sense if approached, as suggested by Proinsias Mac Cana, by recourse to a mythopoetic way of thinking 'where relationship of sound could imply relationship of sense, resolving words and names into their constituent parts was seen as a means of penetrating to mystic truths reflected in the complex system of phonic/semantic correspondences embodied in the spoken language'.[7] So, one could claim that the dissection of a word is to come up with a deeper or wider meaning. In a later article taking some of its inspira-

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[4] One scholar in particular who in later years has contributed to a greater understanding of the medieval etymological thinking is Rolf Baumgarten: cf. 'A Hiberno-Isidorian Etymology', 'Place-names, Etymology, and the Structure of *Fianaigecht*', and 'Creative Medieval Etymology and Irish Hagiography'.

[5] Binchy, 'The Linguistic and Historical Value of the Irish Law Tracts', p. 212, described the legal commentators as self-indulgent, employing the technique 'as a cloak to hide their ignorance'.

[6] The technique is discussed 'as a standard type of diction' in *Auraicept na n-Éces* as it is described by John Carey (Carey, 'H and his World').

[7] Mac Cana, 'Place-Names and Mythology in Irish Tradition', p. 336.

tion from Mac Cana's 'mystic truth' retained by the poets also in historic times, Victor Kalygin, focusing along with Watkins and others on the Indo-European and pre-Christian aspect of the poetic language, claims that the technique of *bélrae n-etarscartha* demonstrates how much a poet's composition resembles what the ancient priest does to the sacrificial animal when he dismembers it so that each part gets its own value and creates of them something new: 'er zerlegt das Opfertier und trennt die einzelnen Teile ab, die dadurch einen Eigenwert annehmen, und er schafft aus ihnen etwas Neues'.[8]

But seeking for an explanation to the widespread Irish use of medieval etymological technique by referring to Indo-European roots and pan-Celticism seems unnecessary when we consider the fact that the medieval Irish scholars were in the forefront in employing Isidore's work *Etymologiae*. Almost from the first appearance of the work, the Irish took a fascination with it. The Archbishop of Seville had died in 636, and already as early as the mid-seventh century we find references to Isidore in Irish sources, especially to his works *Etymologiae* and *De rerum natura*. Both works had a great influence in Ireland, and possibly earlier than in most other European cultures. The oldest extant manuscript of Isidore's *Etymologiae* is written in an Irish hand, that is, with the Irish minuscule (cursive half-uncial), and is to be found in the monastery of Saint Gall founded by Irish missionaries.[9] The Irish writer of *De duodecim Abusivis Saeculi*, which was possibly written between 630 and 650, seems to have been familiar with Isidore's works, especially *Etymologiae*. Further, the work *De ordine Creaturarum*, possibly written by an Irish writer called pseudo-Augustin, is ascribed to Isidore.[10] These are some of the many indications of the popularity of Isidore's work among Irish scholars, and their regard for him was indeed so great that they referred to the *Etymologiae* as the '*cuilmen*' — the culmination of learning. But how could his work come to attain such a pre-eminent position?

One reason could be that Isidore's *Etymologiae* established or, at least, filled in on a horizon the Irish had not till then been very familiar with, namely, the classical Roman tradition, which Isidore's works are so intimately related to; this because Ireland was never part of the Roman Empire like the British neighbour to the east. Also the way the learning was presented seems in particular to have delighted the Irish. Isidore's etymologies offer an encyclopaedic illustration and explanation of what was regarded as worth knowing in the seventh

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[8] Kalygin, 'Indogermanische Dichtersprache', p. 8.

[9] Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 185.

[10] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 194–95.

and eighth centuries. Furthermore, it would appear that the Irish — whether because of their strong poetic tradition or for some other reason — received Isidore's etymological wordplay with particular enthusiasm. Although abundant wordplay can be found in Cicero and the rhetorical tradition generally, Isidore takes the additional step of adapting rhetorical form to exegetical purposes and provides a blueprint for interpretation of history and nature alike — the Irish could not have hoped for a greater set of useful tools in one and the same package.

The example of *bélrae n-etarscartha* given in the early eighth-century *Auraicept na n-Éces*, 'The Primer of the Poets',[11] offers an interesting example of how the homonyms and synonyms given in the etymology of the word *ros* read as a scenario or a tableaux. *Ros* ('wood' probably, but not given) is *roi oiss* ('plain of deer') when it is *rois caelli* ('copses of wood'). It is given as *rass* ('duck meat') along a pool when it is *ros usce* ('*ross* of water') — duck weed, which is (.i.) *rofhos* ('great rest') if on stagnant water or *roidh ass* ('out of it') if it be on a stream and *ro as* when it is *ros lin* ('flax seed') because of its swiftness and the density with which it grows. It is difficult to ignore the scenario or tableaux evoked by this cluster of words. They are not only related by paronymy, they also share topographical features: a 'plain of deer' with 'copses of wood' where there is a pool along which grows 'duck weed' which is called 'duck meat'; over it all resides a 'great rest'; and if there should be a fast stream there, it would be associated with 'flax seed' because of its speed. This mental picture is most likely inspired by mnemo-technique: the inventory is changeable, but the broader line of the picture remains the same. It is also poetical and could easily be elaborated into a poem or a little story.

In the late ninth century, we find in Ireland the famous lexicon or glossary called *Sanas Cormaic* (Cormac's Glossary).[12] This learned work is ascribed to Cormac mac Cuilennáin, a bishop and king from 902 until he was killed in 908. The techniques used in this lexicon of Cormac are clearly influenced by those of Isidore in his *Etymologiae*. An illustrating example is how the word 'canon' is explained: 'cánóin ar is cáin inn udcain' (canon for it is pure (*cáin*) what it says ([*ud-*]*can*)).[13] In this example we see the breaking down of lexical boundaries as the word 'canon' is presented as containing *cáin* and *can*: the

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[11] The age of this part of the text may be younger. It is not in the so-called 'canonical' part published in *The Early Irish Linguist*, ed. and trans. by Ahlqvist.

[12] Cf. *I sanais la ríg Caisil* (Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*); Cormac was killed by Flann Sinna whose ally was another learned bishop (and abbot), Colmán mac Ailill.

[13] Text is downloaded from *The Cambridge Early Irish Glossaries Database*.

adjective *cáin* ('pure, beautiful', etc.) and the verb *can-* ('sings, recites', etc.) are introduced, *inn ud can* (what it recites/says). Paronymy, something approximately homonymous, may also be observed when the first part of *cánóin*, where the *n* is not palatal, is represented by an adjective which ends on a palatal *n* (*cáin*). Further along the same line the stem of the verb 'to sing, to recite, to say' etc. is introduced. According to Frank's classification above, this example is governed by homonymy establishing a pseudo-etymological relationship between them. Both the adjective *cáin* with its palatal *n* and the verbal stem with its short *a* are only almost homonymous with *cán-* in *cánóin* and would not be accepted in rhyme.

This example from Cormac's glossary fulfills all the criteria given by Mary Carruthers in her treatment of the phenomenon of etymology in her study *The Craft of Thought*.[14] There she stresses its mnemo-technical function and mnemonic effectiveness. For Carruthers, however, mnemonics serves cognition and in the process creates, or rather stores, the meaning which makes etymological inquiries possible.[15] Formally she categorizes medieval etymology as 'one principal category of "ornament of style"', but ornament with a function and a meaning — largely ignored by traditional philology. This is where Carruthers diverts from the general trend among scholars to regard what is called or referred to as 'ornament' as void of function and meaning. Carruthers also demonstrates how the great literary scholar Ernst Curtius cannot accept that meaning is not necessarily synonymous with truth, as defined by modern linguistics. Curtius dismisses the examples collated by him from the Bible and from both Greek and Roman writers from Homer to Augustine as 'all I have presented so far can be taken as more or less insipid trifling'. Etmylogizing is a mnemonic technique which implies the troping of literary works, and it is in this activity that the 'meaning' of reading resides, according to Carruthers. 'Meaning' is what the reading 'brings forth in our recollective, inventional ruminations'.[16]

Another example from Cormac's glossary is the word *fiadnaise* (evidence (from an eyewitness))[17] which is explained as 'what God has bound': 'fiad nass .i. fiada [God] ronas [has bound]'. This word of great juridical relevance is also given an etymology in a law text that must be dated towards the earlier part of the Old Irish period, the opposite part of Cormac's text. This law tract is

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[14] Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, pp. 155–61.

[15] Carruthers, 'Inventional Mnemonics and the Ornaments of Style', p. 103.

[16] Carruthers, 'Inventional Mnemonics and the Ornaments of Style', p. 107.

[17] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, p. 202, refers to it as '(eyewitness) evidence' which comes closer to it as a literary device.

called *Berrad Airechta* (The Shaving of the Court)[18] and contains a passage called *Córus fiadnuise* (the ordering of witnessing/regulation of evidence). It is in the opening of this passage that the word for 'witness' (*fiada*) is played on by all means in its 'exegesis' of the word, This should underline how important medieval etymology was for meaning and cognition in general, as indicated by the definition of its function above:

> Cid ara·n-epar *fiada*? — arindi is 'fiada', ar ni·derntar *fiada* acht di aurchond cuibh-sech. No dano *fiado* 'fiad a do'; ar ni óeinfer is coir da *fiadnaise*, it a do no a tri. *Fiadnaise* didiu 'fiad neoch naisi'; ar ni og nach candrath ocna·bi(dh) *fiadnaise* fo bith coimeta comne.[19]

> [Why is witness (*fiada*) so called? Because he is lord (*fiada*), for witnessing cannot be done except by a conscientious responsible person, or else [because] witness (*fiado*) is in the presence of two (*fiad a do*), for [the testimony of] a single man is not lawful in witnessing — two or three persons are [required]. Witnessing (*fiadnaise*), then, [is so called because the transaction] is to be bound (*naisi*)[20] in the presence (*fiad*) of someone, for no contract at which there is no witness present to keep [the details of the transaction] in memory is complete.][21]

In the first explanation based on homonymy an etymological connection is established between the two meanings of the word; the word *fiada* had a least two meanings: 'witness' and 'lord'. Then the same word is introduced but now the last *a* is exchanged with an *o* which is only another form of the same word. Yet I do not see this as coincidental, but rather as done on purpose to establish a homonymic qualification for the next explanation — which comes close to rhyme: *fiad a do* 'in the presence of two' — where *fiad* meaning 'presence' is used as it frequently is, as a preposition ('in the presence of', governing the dative case). Then a longer word is introduced — *fiadnaise* — which is explained as consisting of the word *fiada* and *naisi*, the verbal of necessity of *naiscid* 'to bind', which is an etymology that seems linguistically correct and is accepted as derived from prep. *fiad* and *nass* perf. pass. of *naiscid*. The conclusion can thus introduce *neoch* 'of somebody' in announcing that 'witnessing (evidence) is to be bound in the presence of somebody'.[22]

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[18] Concerning the meaning of the name given to it, cf. Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*: 'the title may mean "court summary, synopsis of court procedure"' (app. 1, no. 61).

[19] Thurneysen, *Die Bürgschaft im irischen Recht*, p. 19, par. 58; the italics are mine.

[20] See above, the explanation of the word *fiadnaise*.

[21] Quoted from Stacey, '*Berrad Airechta*', pp. 219–20, par. 58.

[22] This is Robin Stacey's rendering of the phrase, whereas Thurneysen, *Die Bürgschaft im*

Law and Verse

We have seen etymology being used to explain words in a glossary and in a legal commentary in a law. The fact that etymology is used in law underlines its cognitive importance but also illustrates its rhetorical strength and credibility in verifying a statement. The use of etymology seems to give credence to a statement and vouch for cognition which may explain its frequency.[23]

The etymology discussed above seems formally to be governed by rhyme, metaphors, and metonymies similar to verse. Thus law and learned philology exploit poetic language as is demonstrated in the widespread use of poetic prose called *rosc* in law texts as in other texts to create heightened language. This discourse halfway between prose and verse offers an exotic lexicon and inverted word order with a pointedly different syntax. This seems to be related to the same realm of cognition involving the dismembering and reassembly of words that we saw under *bélrae n-etarscartha*.

In *Imbaccaldam in druad Brain ocus inna banfhatho Febuil hóas Loch Febuil* (The dialogue of Bran's druid and Febul's prophetess above Loch Febuil), an Old-Irish poem, possibly seventh century, edited by James Carney, we see how the word *fíadnaise* ('witnessing') is 'dismembered' to make up a sentence and produce new meaning. The poem consists of a dialogue between Bran's druid (*druí*) and Febul's prophetess (*banfáith*), in which a competition about who had the greatest knowledge (*fiss*) is at the core.[24] The wise man and the prophetess utter four verses each. In verse two, the druid presents his knowledge as strong, comprehensive, and authoritative:

> A nu-mbímmis i ndún Brain
> oc ool isind úargaim
> *fiad* doínib nenaisc tríunu
> dia lluid *mo fhius* co ardníulu. (my emphasis)

[When we were in Dún Brain drinking in the cold winter, my *fiss*, when it went to the high clouds, bound strong men (kings, chieftains) in the presence of people.] (Carney's trans.)

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irischen Recht, p. 19 par. 58, has: 'vor jemand wurde gebunden'. Stacey chooses *naisi* to be the verbal of necessity of *naiscid* whereas Thurneysen takes it as the passive preterite, as also Binchy, 'The Linguistic and Historical Value of the Irish Law Tracts', n. 62 (Stacey, '*Berrad Airechta*', pp. 219–20, par. 58).

[23] See further Breathnach, 'The Glossing of the Early Irish Law Tracts'.

[24] Carney, 'The Earliest Bran Material', p. 184, suggests that *fiss* might in the poem be better translated 'faculty of cognition' which I think is often the case.

It is here demonstrated that the druid's knowledge was so strong that it reached heaven. What he perceives by means of his knowledge consequently has the power of a true (eye)witness that would bind even strong men in court. This sentence seems to refer directly to the same legal practice that is formulated in the law tract above. A reference to witnessing in court reveals the close connection that existed between poetic and legal discourse. There exists alliteration (assonance) between *fiad* and *fhius* which may underlie a close metonymic relation associated between 'being in the presence of people' and the passing of 'knowledge'. The poem demonstrates how closely related the technique behind the structuring of some poems was to the *bélrae n-etarscártha* and how play with serious matters may add to their quality of seriousness (cf. above).

Etymology could be realized not only though homonymy and synonymy, but also through narrative. One observes here that etymology is expanded into histories and tales.[25] Some of the etymological explanations of words given in *Sanas Cormaic* consist of entire stories. These stories show how etymologies can be part of entire tales. One may wonder about the relevance of telling an entire story under an entry in this wordlist. First of all it may seem remarkable that a story is given in lieu of 'synonyms' and shorter etymological explanations which is the norm in the glossary. There are, however, some ten examples of stories of a certain length given under the entries of which the one given under the world *prull* (the word seems to be a hapax, a poetic word) is the longest.[26] I will suggest that an entire story can illustrate the semantic field associated by the word of the entry.[27] *Prull* is, however, explained by two synonyms given before the beginning of the story. These synonyms are *aidbliugud mór* (great increase) and *métugad* (augmentation). The word *aidbliugud* may be a grammatical term for 'intensification' or 'enhancement' which is the way the words are translated by Stokes in the glosses on Priscian (216a3 and 221b3).[28] This suggests that it could also be rendered 'hyperbole'. We shall soon see the 'enhancement' or 'hyperbole' play out in the story.

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[25] Etymology and its bearings on narratives has been discussed for the structure of Finnian-tales (*Fianaigecht*) and for some miracle legends by Baumgarten: 'Place-names, Etymology, and the Structure of *Fianaigecht*' and 'Creative Medieval Etymology and Irish Hagiography'.

[26] Cf. Russell, 'Poets, Power and Possessions in Medieval Ireland', who treats these ten comparatively.

[27] I hope to make an examination of the structure and meaning of all the longer stories given in Cormac's glossary.

[28] The example is taken from *Sanas Cormaic*, ed. by Meyer, p. 32, no. 393, but see also Stokes's edition: p. 35 and p. 48.

The narrative itself has received attention by scholars for its actual meaning but not for being included in a wordlist, with Paul Russell as the exception.[29] The explanations of words can take on various forms and functions; some consist of etymological analyses in some cases combined with explanations.[30]

The tale is about the master poet Senchán Toirpéist who goes on a trip to the Isle of Man with a retinue of poets. We are told how exceptionally well clad Senchán is. When they are leaving, a hideous looking lad of unnatural appearance asks them to let him come with them. His disgusting appearance is described in detail. He claims that he would be of greater use to Senchán than his 'arrogant foolish crew'. Senchán takes him on board and his crowd screams: 'A monster has reached you'. Then the tale comes up with an etymology of his eponym Toirpéist: 'It is on account of that that he was called Senchán *Toirpéist*, that is, 'Senchán "whom the monster reached"'. Reaching the Isle of Man they notice a grey-haired old woman gathering seaweed, but her feet and hands are excellent and noble. We are told that she is a woman poet called *banléiccerd* (or, *bainlethcherd*), daughter of úa Dulsaine, from Muscraige of Lia Toll in Ireland. She had gone on a tour around Ireland, Britain, and Man, but all her company had died. Her brother had searched for her but had not found her. The old woman asks them who they are. They answer her that only a foreigner did not know Senchán, the poet of all Ireland. Then she immediately recites a half stanza to Senchán, asking what the other half is. Senchán does not know the answer, but the hideous looking boy intervenes giving the second half. This she does three times, and finally Senchán recognizes her as the poetess gone lost. She is bathed and dressed in wondrous clothing and goes back to Ireland with Senchán. When they arrive in Ireland the hideous youth has transformed into a most beautiful appearance clad in royal apparel. The story concludes that he was the spirit of poetry.

The following text is taken from the Y version: Yellow Book of Lecan (TCD, MS 1318 (H.2.16)), cols 3–88.

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[29] Russell, 'Poets, Power and Possessions in Medieval Ireland'; Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The *Prull* Narrative in *Sanas Cormaic*'; Ford, 'The Blind, the Dumb, and the Ugly'; Dooley, 'Early Irish Literature'. The various meanings read out of this narrative by these four scholars reveal its polyglossic quality and many-layered meaning so pertinent for its being part of the medieval Irish tradition of glosses and glossaries.

[30] See Russell, 'Poets, Power and Possessions in Medieval Ireland', pp. 12–15.

Prull .i. aidbliugud mor 7 metugad, ut dixit ingen hui Dulsaine in bainlethcerd fri Senchan Torpeist i mManainn .i. immomloiscet mo de n-o prull. friscart iarom int eigess di muinthir Senchain .i.

in cerd mac hui Dulsaine
o Liac do Tursaige Thull.

is de tra roboi .i. do Senchan inni sin. docorustair fair techt a Manaind .i. fecht n-ainius do chor cuarto indi. caoga egess a llin cenmothæ ecsine. is ing ma rodm-baei didiu riam im nach oile eces samail in cumduigh robæi irn Senchan cenmotha a tughan suadh 7 rl. an romba dech do timtagaib flatha fer nGaoidel, is ed bertatur ind eis chena impu.

intan tra documlaiset for fairgi 7 docorustar a lui no urland fri tir, adagladastar gil-lae ecuisc anindustae ina ndiaid den tir nomleicid-si lib, ol se. doecet uile in gillae. ni bu data leo iarom a lecud cucae, ar ba fæ leo nip n-en comadus ina n-eill, ar ba dochraid a ecuscc. intan cetamas dobered nech a mer for a etan, notheged a thaosc di gur bren for a dib culadaib, a chongrus crace do tar a mullach co maothan a da imdæd. ata la nech asitchid batar caib a inchinde romebdatar tria coicend. cuirritir ogh luin a di suil. luaithitir fiamain, duibidir éc, buidithir ór rind a fiaclae, glaisitir bun cuiluld a mbun. da lurgain lomchaola. da ṡeirith birdae brecanba foe. dia talta de in cheirt bui uime, ni bu decmaing techt di for imirgi a haonar, mana fuirmithe cloch fuirre, ar imat a mil.

doriucart o guth mor fri Senchan 7 isbert fris bem torbach-sa duit-si oldas ind ne no ind re no in de forfuallach forbaoth fil immut. in setir lat, ol Senchan, tuidecht iarsin lui isin curach. promfit, ol se. cingthe iarom iarsin luidh isin curach, luaith-idir lochaid iar forgarmain, co mbai isin curach. ba suaill tra co rroibdithe in curach cona lucht arindi rombrogsat roime-sium insindara leth in lestair 7 in leth n-aill do-sum, 7 atbertatare amail bid a haongiun dotrorbai peist, a Senchain, bid si do muinnter uile acht connernam no connerlam docum tire. IS de sin tra robai do-sum Senchan Torpeist .i. Senchan dororba pest no paist.

recait iarom i Manaind. fonacbat a coblach i tir. a mbadar didiu oc imtecht iarsin traigh, go facatar in tsentuinne moingleith moir iarsin carraic, ut poeta dixit

sentuinde ocus senbachlach,
rop ses rophuis .i. scuap adnacail a crinfeis,
acht nochanfognat Mac De
is ni thabrat a primleis .i. a primite.

Amlaid bui in caillech for in traigh, ag buain na femnuige 7 in marthoraid olchena. airegdai grata a cossa 7 a llamha, acht natmbui etach maith n-impe, 7 bái anfeith gorta fuirre 7 ba liach son immorro, ar ba sisi in bainleccerd ingin Ui Dulsaine di Muscraige Liach Tuill a cricu Ua Fidgenti. dochuaid idhe didiu for cuairt Eirenn 7

Alban 7 Mannand 7 ba marb a muinter uile. bai iarom a bratair mac ui Dulsaine, cerd amra sidhe, dano ac a hiarmoracht fo crich Eirean 7 nis-fuair, 7 reliqua. atan didiu atconnairc in tsentsinde inna heicsiu

imuscomarcatair cibtar he. math i re immidcomairc Senchan eges Erend uile ind so.

inatbie do humalldoid, a Senchain, ol si, anad frim aithessc-sa. rombia em, ol Senchan.

nibsa eolaig imnig odbaigh
ciasa femmain bolgaigh bung,

cati a lethchomarc.

sochtaid Senchan iarom 7 ind ecis uile dano. doling iarom in gilldæ remeperta ar beulu Senchain 7 asbert sta, a caillech. na acaille Senchan. ni comadas dit. atomglaidesa amne, ol nitacelladbar nach aile don muintir-si.

Cid didiu, ol in bainnlethcerd, caiti a lethrand.

ni ansa, or se

de muin cairge mare Manann
doronad mor saland sund.

is fir, or si, 7 in lethrand hisiu dano .i.

imommloiscet mo da n-o prull,

caiti a lethrann, a Senchain, beos.
amein, ol in gillæ, oc saigid dit acallma Senchain, nit-acelladar em.
ceist didiu, cati lat-sa, ol si.
ni ansa, ol se

in cerd mac ui Dulsaine
o Liic do Tursaige Thull.

fir son, or Senchan, in tusa ingen Ui Dulsaine, in bainlicerd oc atatbar cuingidh sechnon Erenn.

is me em, or si.

fothraicer iarom la Senchan di. dobret dechelt n-amra uimpi 7 tainic la Senchán docum nEirenn. intan tra tangatar docum Erend conacatar in gillæ remepertae, ar ba hoclach ruithentae righae rornor roiscletan mormileta eseom, co muing órbuidhe órṡnaith fathmaindigh, caisidir carra menucrot, tlacht rochaom rigdae uimbe, milech orduide a n-imdunad in tlachta sin. Sciath corcra cobradach cetha-

rochair, lan do gemaib carrmogail 7 liag logmar 7 nemthand 7 cristal 7 sathfire for a
clíu. cloidhemh coilgdirech co tairchetlaib oir deirg for a deiscib, cathbarr airgidhe
co coroín orduighe im a cend. dealb is airechdam 7 is aidbli luchracht bui for daine
riamh fair.

teid iarsin deisil Senchain cona muinyir, et nusquam aparuit ex illo tempore.
dubium itaque non est quod ille Poematis erat spiritus.[31]

The following translation is that of Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The *Prull*
Narrative in *Sanas Cormaic*', which follows Thurneysen's *Urtext*-edition based
on the witnesses to Prull with a translation into German, 'Zu Cormacs Glossar'.
Ní Dhonnchadha's translation follows Thurneysen's closely and will conse-
quently diverge slightly from the Y-version but is the best English translation
available as far as I know.

Prull, i.e. 'increase' and 'augmentation', as the woman-*léiccerd*, daughter of úa Dul-
saine, saif to Senchán Torpéist in the Isle of Man:

'my two ears burn me "greatly" (*prull*)'.

Thereupon, the novice-poet (*écsíne*) from Senchán's company responded as fol-
lows:

'the *cerd*, child of úa Dulsaine,
from Lia Toll Taursaige'.

This is why that happened to Senchán. He chanced to go to the Isle of Man, on a
pleasure-trip with the purpose of making a circuit there. Fifty poets (*éicis*) was their
number, excluding novice-poets. Hardly any poet before that had worn the like of
Senchán's clothing, not to mention his sage's mantle (*tuigen súad*), etc. What was
finest of the clothing of the nobles of the Gaels, this is what the poets put on.

When they put out to sea and set the stern towards land, a lad of unnatural
appearance called after them from the shore. 'Let me go with you', he said. They
all look at the lad. They did not wish to let him join them for they thought that
he was not a bird fit for their flock because his appearance was hideous. To begin
with, when one put a finger to his forehead, a spurt of putrid matter used to pour
down the back of his neck. He had suppuration (?) from the crown of his head to
the gristle of his shoulders. Anyone who saw it would think that it was the clots of
his brain that had broken through his skull. Each of his two eyes was as round as a
blackbird's egg, as black as death, as quick as a cat (?). The points of his teeth were

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[31] The text is from *The Cambridge Early Irish Glossaries Database*. The paragraphing is
mostly that of *Sanas Cormaic*, ed. by Meyer, p. 93.

as yellow as gold, their roots were as green as the stock of a holly tree. Two bare, spindly shanks with two spiky, speckle-dark heels under him. If the rag he wore were stripped off him, it would have had little difficulty in setting out on its own, unless a stone were placed on it, on account of teeming vermin.

He shouted loudly at Senchán and he said to him: 'I'll be of greater use to you', he said, 'than the arrogant foolish crew that's around you'. 'Can you come along the rudder into the currach?' 'I'll try', he said. Then he stepped along the rudder into the currach, as fast as a mouse along a loom-beam, and he was aboard. The currach with its load all but went under, because the poets pressed forward before him from one end of the vessel to the other, and they said as though from one mouth: 'A monster has reached you, Senchán! He'll be your sole company, if only we can make our escape ashore'. It is on account of that that he was called Senchán *Torpéist*, that is, 'Senchán "whom the monster reached"'.

They reached the Isle of Man after that. They brought their vessel ashore. When they were going along the strand, they saw the tall grey-haired old woman on the rock gathering seaweed together with sea-produce. Excellent and noble were her feet and hands, except that she did not have fine clothing and the emaciation of famine was on her. And that was pitiful, for this was the woman-*léiccerd*, daughter of úa Dulsaine, from Múscraige of Lia Toll in the territory of Uí Fhidgenti. She had gone on a circuit of Ireland and Britain and Man, and all her company were dead. Her brother, the son of úa Dulsaine — an eminent *cerd* also — was searching for her throughout the territories of Ireland and he did not find her, etc.

'Will you be so gracious, Senchán, as to stay and hear what I have to say?'
'I will indeed', said Senchán.

'I was not accustomed to knotty tribulation,
Although I reap bladdered seaweed.

'What is the other half-stanza?'

Then Senchán grows silent, as do all the poets. With that, the aforementioned lad bounds out in front of Senchán and he said: 'Shush, woman! Don't address Senchán. It's not appropriate for you. Address yourself to me since no one else from the retinue will speak to you'.

'If that is so', said the woman-*léiccerd*, 'what's the other half-quatrain?' 'Not difficult', said he:

'From the top of a rock in the Sea of Man,
much salt has been made here'.

'True', said she, 'and now for this half-quatrain:

'My two ears burn me greatly.

'What's the other half-quatrain, Senchán?'

> 'What! You still seek to address Senchán! He won't speak to you'.
> 'Well, then, what do you think it is?' said she.
> 'Not difficult', he said.

'The *cerd*, child of úa Dulsaine,
from Lia Toll Taursaige'.

'That is true!' said Senchán. 'Are you the daughter of úa Dulsaine, the woman-*léiccerd* who is being sought troughout Ireland?'

> 'I am indeed', said she. Then she was bathed by Senchán and she was dressed in wondrous clothing and came with Senchán to Ireland.

> When Senchán reached Ireland, they saw the aforementioned lad: he was now a youth with golden yellow hair, wavy as the scrollings (?) on harps. He was clad in royal apparel, and he had the finest appearance ever seen on any man. He comes right-hand wise around Senchán and his retinue, and he has never appeared since that time. And thus it is certain that he was the Spirit of Poetry.

The fanciful story is about poets and poetical competition in which the challenge at stake is to be able to come up with the second half of a couplet pertaining to the former. It is a story, however, not only of making halves into wholes, but also of a hideous and monstrous poet turning into the loveliest of appearances when it is revealed that he is the spirit of poetry (*spiritus poematis* as he is referred to in the Latin ending of the tale).

In similar manner the female poet in rags turns out to be of noble lineage and a famous poetess gone missing. The term used on the poetess is *bainlethcherd* (also, *banléiccerd*). She is the one who challenges them with her half-quatrains. In the *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, *lethcherd* is translated as 'a name of a kind of a poet'.[32] I would suggest that this kind of poet was one especially trained in memorizing quatrains by their halves so that he/she would remem-

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[32] Ní Dhonnchadha ('The *Prull* Narrative in *Sanas Cormaic*') agrees with Thurneysen's *Urtext* ('Zu Cormacs Glossar') that the form of the term of poet should be *léiccerd* and interpreted as a compound of *liaig* 'leech' and *cerd*. Kuno Meyer in his edition of *Sanas Cormaic* from the Yellow Book of Lecan has two forms, *bainlethcerd* and *bainlicerd*. The *bainlethcherd* may indicate a female poet specialized in half-quatrains, which fits nicely into the tale. The term *lethcherd* is mentioned in *Bretha Nemed* III, IV, and V on the grade of *filid* and *bards*. Here the title *lethcherd* is described as poet who 'takes half of (poetic) skill (*Bretha Nemed* V). In *Bretha Nemed* III, it says that a lethcherd 'is estimated as a luminary who attempts lawful chantings, compositions of poetic learning, the dignity of all knowledge ('Messa lochett lethcerd | laimithur dicedla dligid | drechta coimnghne | cata gac fis'). (*Uraicecht na Ríar*, ed. and trans. by Breathnach, p. 35).

ber the entire quatrain by a half of it. In this case it is a woman 'quatrain-poet'.
As has been pointed out by Ford and Ní Dhonnchadha the scenario may origi-
nally have been part of a satire. The way the female poet challenges Senchán
Toirpéist seems to support this suggestion. Also her family-name Ua Dulsaine
points in that direction as 'dulsaine' means mockery, satire. It is the interven-
tion of the spirit of poetry who rescues the master-poet Senchán from being
shamed or satirized by the *bainlethcherd*.

As it stands here it is a story about what poetry does with language, how it
enhances and augments plain language into beauty. This is illustrated also by
the young lad who turns out to be the spirit of poetry. After having initially
been ugly and clothed in rags, the lad turns into a beautifully clad young man
when his true identity is revealed through demonstration of his poetic skills.
Quite as important, the story demonstrates that poetry reveals truth. It is
through the quatrains recited that also the identity of the poor looking woman
is finally revealed and she is 'enhanced' into the lost poetess. On a metalevel
this is also what the glossary does with the obscure word *prull*: it reveals its
hidden meaning. The word *prull* is used in the last half-quatrain cited by the
old woman to which the other half is the answer to whom she is: 'the poet,
child of úa Dulsaine | from Lia Toll Taursaige' ('in cherd mac húi Dulsine |
o Liac do Taursaige Tull'). It is significant that the word *prull* is used in the first
half of the quatrain in which it is revealed who the woman is. This enables us to
regard the word also as a turning point that triggers the deeper or, rather, addi-
tional meaning of poetry, which is given by the next half of the quatrain. The
identification of the woman revealed on the Isle of Man has its parallel in the
frame story situated in Ireland, in the ugly unknown lad that enters the boat
who finally when back in Ireland is identified as the beautiful spirit of poetry.
We find here an intriguing progression of enhancement into one's true identity,
but also a connection of true identity and poetry and thus to language. While
Sanas Cormaic, as an intellectual project, is indebted to Isidore, it is also deeply
embedded in a local tradition where poetic language is every bit as connected
to truth and identity as are etymologies in a more Isidorean sense. The result
is a treatise that precisely in its adaptations of a European heritage betrays its
unmistakingly Irish views on cognition through language.

Tales

We have seen etymology being used in the exegesis of a secular law text. Law
is not alien to the use of rhyming syllabic verse, even though the use is limited
in the Old Irish period. Liam Breathnach points out *roscad* in the law texts

described by Charles-Edwards as being either in 'early meter or presented in condensed and allusive prose'.[33] Allusion, however, also abounds, as does etymology. Charles-Edwards underlines the bookish quality of the etymologizing based more on the eye than the ear, more so than with Isidore.[34]

We have seen how this kind of etymological explanation is alluded to in a poem or, rather, how it is used to unfold a picture, a scenario. Hence, it may not be too speculative to assume that a prose narrative could be constructed in a similar or related manner to that in the poem, with a motif, even the main motif, laid out according to an etymological explanation underlying the narrative — familiar to many a medieval mind, not yet grasped by modern readers.

The Irish murder-tale *Aided Celtchair meic Uthechair* (The Sudden Death of Celtchar mac Uthechair) is constructed with great skill and sophistication. In this tale we hear of the death of both the *briugu* ('hospitaller')[35] Blaí and his murderer, the champion Celtchar mac Uthechair, among others.[36]

A major part of the tale seems to be built up around the famous weapon with which Uthechar was associated in the tradition: the *lúin* 'lance'. This lance of Celtchar (*lúin Celtchair*) is described in the mythological tale *Togail Bruidne da Derga* (The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel): 'Whenever the blood of the enemies is about to flow from the lance, a cauldron full of venom is required to quench it; otherwise, the lance will blaze up into the fist of the man carrying it, and it will pierce him or the lord of the royal house. Each thrust of this lance will kill a man, even if it does not reach him; if the lance is cast, it will kill nine men, and there will be a king or royal heir or plundering chieftain in their number.'[37] This is the spear with which Celtchar kills Blaí and finally his own dog. I will suggest that the entire tale, *Aided Celtchair meic Uthechair*, is at one level composed according to a metaphorical and metonymical pattern based on this particular spear and on retaliation.

After having killed Blaí, Celtchar escaped to Déisi in Munster. The men of Ulster complained to King Conchobar that Celtchar would ruin it. 'Let him come back to his land', said the Ulster-men. Conchobar gives in to their

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[33] Charles-Edwards, 'Review Article', pp. 146–47; see Breathnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, p. 370.

[34] Charles-Edwards, 'Review Article', p. 148.

[35] A *briugu* is a rich landowner with a public function of dispensing unlimited hospitality to all persons in his hostel, which must be in an accessible position.

[36] There is a new edition of it in McCone, *A First Old Irish Grammar and Reader*, pp. 169–71.

[37] Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, p. 97.

demand and lets Celtchar's son go to bring him back, serving as his father's safeguard (*comairce*). Celtchar wonders why his son has come. 'So that you may come (back) to your land', answers the son. The father wonders who would be his safeguard and is told that the son is to be the safeguard. Then the father exclaims: 'Subtle (*séimh*) is the treachery (*muin*); ruse that the men of Ulster bring upon me, to go on my son's guarantee (e.g. neck (*muin*)' ('Is *séimh* in *muin* doberat Ulaid ummum-sa techt for *muin* mo mic'). This sentence epitomizes the words around which the story evolves and demonstrates their double meaning. *Séimh* means 'subtle' when taken with *muin* in the meaning 'trick', but since the homonym *muin* 'neck, guarantee' follows after, this also evokes the primary meaning of *séimh* and thus 'slender/thin neck'. This scene also gives a perspective to the previous one in which the hospitaller found no safeguard where he was to expect it. A druid prophesized then that 'séimh' should be his name and the name of his tribe. After this episode a meta-commentary follows that this is why there is a place called *Semuine* in Déisi. The etymological explanation of the tribal name Semuine, an insertion here, belongs to the genre of place lore or place-name lore so widespread in the Irish tradition. There are, however, reasons to suggest that this wordplay introduces a metaphorical pattern reflected in the ensuing episodes describing Celtchar's recompense for the murder of Blái when back in Ulster. The fine that is put on Celtchar for the murder of Blái is to free the Ulstermen from the three worst pests in Ulster in his time. All three tasks are handled by means of treachery or tricks.

The first one is to get rid of a champion called Conganchnes nac Dedad who had come to Ulster to avenge his brother Cúrói. Spears and swords did not hurt him because of his horn skin, hence the name Conganchnes — 'horn-skin'. The only way to kill him, Celtchar finds out, is to have 'red hot iron spits' (*bir*, *bera* pl. means also 'spear' probably through metonymy) thrust into his soles and up his shins (*lurga* also means 'stem').[38] This knowledge Cetlchar obtained through playing a trick on Conganchnes ('tarad *muin* uime') by offering him his daughter and a great dinner, and Celtchar's daughter finds out about the only way possible to have Conganchnes killed. Here the word *muin* is again used meaning 'trick'.

The second trial is to kill a dog that a widower's son finds in a hollow of an oak (*cúas omna*; *omna* can also have the meaning 'spear-shaft, spear') and

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[38] 'Bera derga iarnaidi do tapairt im bonnaib ocus tria mo luirgnib'. McCone, *A First Old Irish Grammar and Reader*, p. 14.

which the widow reared. A widow with a son is in need of protection. She may have thought the dog would provide them with that. Instead it turned against them. The dog started killing the widow's sheep, her son, and finally kills the widow herself before it goes on to harass Ulster. Celtchar kills the dog by means of a trick in the shape of a log of an alder (*cep ferna*; *ferna* also has the meaning 'shield; pole, stake'). The log is carved empty so Celtchar can get his arm through it. When the dog bites the log Celtchar puts his arm through it inside the dog and pulls out his heart.

The last task is Celtchar's own dog that has gone wild during Celtchar's absence, killing cattle all over Ulster. But when Celtchar calls for him, he comes and licks his master's feet. The master, however, pulls out the dog's heart by his spear (*gai*). When Celtchar afterwards raises his spear, a drop of the dog's blood runs down the shaft towards him and goes through him and kills him. The great number of references to slender artefacts involved in the depiction of Celtchar's trials and how he performs them is striking. They all imply strong surface and hollow or weak interior: First, there is Conganchnes himself, who as his name indicates has an impenetrable skin, but if spears are put up into his shins through his soles he dies. The shins in themselves also symbolize something thin. Furthermore, the word *lurga* 'shin' also has the meaning 'stem', alluding to the many long but slender objects involved, including the hollow log, which thus becomes an image of Conganches with his hard surface but penetrable interior. Then we hear of the wild dog, which was found in a hollow trunk, that turns against his mistress and her son. This dog is killed by means of a log carved empty — with something very similar in which it was found as a whelp. The dog also has to be penetrated to be killed. So also does Celtchar's own dog, now with his own spear that pulls out the dog's heart. It is moreover the spear that transmits/brings the poisonous blood from the dog onto Celtchar. One may argue that we have a cluster of words all signifying something slender through which something is brought to have the warrior and the two dogs killed. It is also the slender neck of Celtchar's son that brings him back and ultimately leads to his death. All the artefacts used in the three episodes are metaphors for weapons. If we consider that the Irish *cú* (dog) is among the most common epithets for a warrior or champion, the weapons here are used against a *cú* — a metaphor — and may illustrate consequently how weapons may hit back on the user when used unjustly and in furor, the driving force behind Celtchar's initial killing of Blaí. This has its climax in the scene where Celtchar is killed by a drop of the dog's blood running down his spear which killed Blái and whose drop of blood asked for revenge and finally gets it here. The reason why the dog's blood should be poisonous may be related to

what was said about Celtchar's lance in *The Destruction of da Derga's Hostel*, a tale older than the present one.

All we have seen serves as illustration of slender and thin, but hollow and vulnerable tricks or subtle guile from the murder of Blái. The way Celtchar uses his daughter to get to Conganchnes may support the assumption that he also used his wife to get an opportunity to kill Blái. To kill a hospitaller whose obligation it is to afford hospitality to everybody depicts a warrior who lacks restraint — who turns against the people he is meant to protect.[39] The dogs that he is set to kill represent himself.

In this paper we have seen the early influence on the Irish tradition from Isidore's *Etymologiae* and *De rerum natura*. This is clearly demonstrated in the early eighth-century work *Auraicept na n-Éces* and is further played out in the late ninth-century glossary *Sanas Cormaic*. We have also seen an early poem which refers to jurisprudence of witnessing by means of wordplay — assonance and metonymy. Finally, I discuss an Irish death-tale in which the tale to a great extent is constructed by means of etymology, wordplay, and allegory on the words *séim muin* ('slender neck', 'subtle trick', etc.).

The medieval etymological technique in the Irish tradition described as *bél-rae n-etarscartha* is not only demonstrated by means of glosses in early texts and under various entries in wordlists, but seems also to influence the structure of entire tales. The question to what extent the etymological technique reveals a certain way of understanding texts invites further extensive research.

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[39] Cf. McCone, 'Aided Cheltchair maic Uthechair', pp. 14ff.

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Puns and Poetic Style
in Old English

Eric Weiskott

> If man will strike, strike through the mask!
> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851)

English poetry written in the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries comes down to modern scholars with little secure information about date of composition, authorship, or place of composition. The Old English poetic corpus encompasses an array of genres and topics, from brief monologues to riddles to lengthy biblical narratives. Cutting across these categories is a single poetic metre and a highly conventionalized poetic style. Old English verse, characteristically sententious, utilizes paronomasia and wordplay to achieve particular literary effects. Yet writers from this period have left behind no *ars poetica* recording their perceptions of English metre or poetic style. Medieval English poets practised literary form at a time when vernacular poetics had not yet become an academic subject or a sustained cultural discourse. As such, the best available evidence for the cultural status of vernacular poetry in this phase of English literary history may be the poetry itself. This essay identifies extensive wordplay in one Old English poem and reads this wordplay as an index of the tastes and aims of a long-lost interpretive community.

After summarizing the evidence for the dating, circulation, authorship, and localization of Old English poetry, this essay assesses older and newer critical approaches in Old English studies, with special attention to work on wordplay and poetic style. In light of the scant evidence for traditional categories of contextualization afforded by most Old English verse, I argue that poetic style can

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sometimes provide more precise answers to pressing literary-historical questions. The next section identifies and discusses several puns on nautical terminology in the Old English *Exodus*, a 590-line narrative poem very loosely based on Exodus 13. 18–14. 31 and attested uniquely in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11 (late tenth c.).[1] Junius 11 also contains *Genesis* and *Daniel*, longer and more straightforward versifications of those biblical books, and *Christ and Satan*, an imaginative dialogue in verse. I direct consideration of wordplay in *Exodus* toward an understanding of the genre and purpose of the poem, in order to begin to answer the question posed by Roberta Frank in 1988, 'What kind of poetry is *Exodus*?'.[2]

The greater part of Old English poetry is extant in four codices produced in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, two of which also contain vernacular prose texts. These are Vercelli Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII ('Vercelli Book') (late tenth c.); Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501 ('Exeter Book') (late tenth c.); MS Junius 11; and London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A xv ('*Beowulf* manuscript') (late tenth/early eleventh c.).[3] Among the two hundred extant Old English poems, four short poems happened to be preserved in early Latin or epigraphical contexts: *Cædmon's Hymn* (late seventh/early eighth c.); *A Proverb from Winfrid's Time* (eighth c.); the Franks Casket inscription (eighth c.); and *Bede's Death Song* (eighth/ninth c.). Apart from these, no Old English poem can confidently be dated before *c*. 850.[4] There is, then, no direct

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[1] An excellent general introduction to the manuscript is *The Poems of MS Junius 11*, ed. by Liuzza. Thanks are due to Irina Dumitrescu, Roberta Frank, and Mikael Males for commenting on earlier versions of this essay.

[2] Frank, 'What Kind of Poetry Is *Exodus*?'. Cf. Frank, 'Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences Have a Skaldic Tooth?'.

[3] The poems in the Vercelli Book are edited in *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie (hereafter, *ASPR*), ii; the Exeter Book in *ASPR*, iii; Junius 11 in *ASPR*, i; and the poems in the *Beowulf* manuscript in *ASPR*, iv. The Vercelli Book and the *Beowulf* manuscript also contain prose.

[4] The four datably early poems are edited in *ASPR*, vi. The Ruthwell Cross inscription may postdate the eighth-century cross by centuries: see most recently Conner, 'The Ruthwell Monument Runic Poem in a Tenth-Century Context', disputed by Meyvaert, 'Necessity Mother of Invention'. The text of the *Leiden Riddle* may postdate its early ninth-century manuscript: Parkes, 'The Manuscript of the Leiden Riddle', disputed by Gerritsen, 'Leiden Revisited'. On the basis of language and orthography, Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter*, § 72, dates the *Riddle* between the eighth century and 'the middle of the ninth' (cf. Fulk, pp. 404–05). A recently discovered silver object from Lincolnshire is inscribed in runes with a few fragmentary lines of Old English verse, dated to the eighth century on linguistic and orthographical grounds by Hines, 'The *Benedicite* Canticle in Old English Verse'.

evidence for the early circulation of Old English poems as poems. The field of English poetry comes into clearer focus after 950, to which period a number of poems can be assigned on internal evidence.[5]

Even less is known about the authorship of the poems. A mere six Old English poems are tentatively attributed to a grand total of three named poets, two short early poems on external evidence (*Bede's Death Song* attributed to Bede by his pupil Cuthbert and *Cædmon's Hymn* attributed to Cædmon by Bede) and four long undated poems on internal evidence (*Christ II*, *Elene*, *Fates of the Apostles*, and *Juliana*, all signed in runic acrostics by one 'Cyn(e) wulf'). Several relatively neglected verse colophons and inscriptions offer more floating names, but these 'poets' would have identified themselves primarily as scribes, annotators, engravers, mourners, or owners of jewelry.[6] Three poems claim to have been written by King Alfred (r. 871–99): the *Meters of Boethius* and the *Metrical Preface* and *Metrical Epilogue* to the Old English translation of Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*. However, Alfred may not have composed any of them.[7] Among accepted named poets, only the historian Bede (d. 735) possesses a verifiable biographical existence.

Little more is known about the geographical provenance of individual poems. The three poems attributed to Alfred presumably hail from Wessex. Because they were unfamiliar with Old English and/or applied Latin textual standards and so copied *literatim*, the scribes of the earliest texts of *Bede's Death Song*, *Cædmon's Hymn*, and the *Leiden Riddle* (eighth/mid-ninth c.) incidentally preserved orthographical and linguistic forms indicative of early Northumbrian provenance.[8] The Ruthwell Cross inscription, whether carved immediately or long after the creation of the eighth-century cross, is likewise localizable to Northumbria, though its specific relation to shared lines in the *Dream of the Rood*, found in the Vercelli Book, is not clear. The four poetic

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[5] These are the *Battle of Maldon* (*c*. 991); *Thureth* (*c*. 1011: *ASPR*, VI, pp. lxxxviii–xc); *Durham* (1104–09: *ASPR*, VI, pp. xliv–xlv, disputed now by O'Donnell, 'The Old English *Durham*, the *Historia de sancto Cuthberto*, and the Unreformed in Late Anglo-Saxon Literature'); and several short topical poems in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, some of which are edited in *ASPR*, VI.

[6] See, e.g., Okasha, *Hand-list of Anglo-Saxon Non-runic Inscriptions*, items 66 ('Ædred' and 'Eanred') and 114 ('Ædvþen').

[7] The *Meters of Boethius* is edited in *ASPR*, V, and *The Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine. The *Metrical Preface* and *Metrical Epilogue* are edited in *ASPR*, VI. On the authorship of these poems cf. Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?' and Bately, 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything?'.

[8] The *Leiden Riddle* is edited in *ASPR*, VI.

codices were rendered in a West Saxon *Schriftsprache* or literary standard that erases most traces of prior early and/or non–West Saxon forms, if any. The one datably pre-Alfredian poem that appears in one of the four poetic codices (*Leiden Riddle = Riddle 35* in the Exeter Book) was fully translated into the *Schriftsprache*, with only the equivocal evidence of one non-standard spelling (*Riddle 35* 2b *ǽrist* (first) instead of standard *ǽrest*) to hint that the text has passed through another orthographic system. In addition to the difficulties associated with large-scale interdialectal translation or standardization, Old English poets from all regions appear to have drawn upon an artificial, dialectally mixed lexicon and metrical phonology, significantly complicating attempts to establish dialect origins on linguistic or metrical grounds.[9] Neither structural nor non-structural evidence for dialectal localization, then, can be taken at face value.

The Anglo-Saxons made our task of contextualizing their poetry the more difficult by leaving behind no overt discussion of vernacular poetics. It is doubtful whether such texts ever existed, for poets had little cause to theorize their practice in the vernacular at a time when English was a distant second choice to Latin in literary culture. Old English words for 'poetry' and 'poem' are unstandardized terms of general application, for example, *cwide* (expression, saying, sentence); *fit* and *leoð* (song, poem); and *leoðcræft* (the art of poetry, poem). *Faute de mieux*, scholars have imported to the study of Old English poetry both classical genres ('elegy', 'epic', 'lyric') and putatively pagan genres posited by nineteenth-century antiquarians ('heroic lay', 'thula'), with mixed results. The inappropriate expectations raised by the classical term 'epic', for example, impeded the appreciation of the *Beowulf* poet's literary achievement for over a century, until the publication of an epoch-making lecture by J. R. R. Tolkien in 1936.[10] The map of Old English literary fields must be inferred from poetic practice, without the benefit of native terminology.

In the absence of secure dates, authors, locations, or genres for most Old English poetry, including *Exodus*, modern criticism has focused on rhetoric and poetic form. The authoritative collection of Old English poetry in the six-volume *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, with its modern titles and modern lineation, had the effect of presumptively normalizing the whole corpus, as though a riddle inscribed in runes on an eighth-century whalebone box and a three-thou-

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[9] Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*, pp. 119–39. Megginson, 'The Case against a "General Old English Poetic Dialect"', opposes, not Sisam's theory, but the idea of a shared orthography for Old English poetry taken up by some later scholars.

[10] Tolkien, 'Beowulf', p. 254: '[*Beowulf*] may turn out to be no epic at all'.

sand-line narrative poem copied in an eleventh-century poetic anthology self-evidently belonged to the same category of thing. A recent critical history characterizes *Beowulf* studies as 'dominated by ahistoricizing, formalist approaches that contribute to the widespread impression of scholars in later periods that it is antiquated and out of touch with the wider concerns of the profession, and even of medieval scholarship'.[11] Yet the recognition of the unknown does not entail the belief that it is not worth knowing. Nor is it clear why 'formalist' approaches must be 'ahistoricizing': poetic form itself has a history.[12] If traditional literary-historical inquiry has failed to yield satisfying answers to basic questions about the production and consumption of Old English poetry, specialists must seek to make new uses of the available evidence.

The most abundant class of evidence is certainly the poetry itself. Over thirty thousand lines of Old English verse survive in manuscripts, glosses, scribbles, inscriptions, and modern transcripts of lost manuscripts. More promising recent approaches to Old English poetry attend to the various material, intellectual, and formal contexts of the extant poems. In contrast to both an Old Historicism that would impose totalized periodizations upon poetic texts from the outside in ('the Age of Bede', 'the Viking Age') and an Old Formalism that would mechanically date poems on available linguistic-metrical evidence irrespective of potential stylistic, diatopic, or textual-historical variation, newer approaches regard the style and contexts of Old English poems as important evidence of the literary communities that produced and received them. For example, in 1986 Patrick Conner marshalled codicological, paleographical, and literary evidence to show that the Exeter Book was originally produced as three separate booklets, and his findings are now generally accepted, along with their consequences for study of the transmission and literary affinities of the poems in each booklet.[13] In a recent book-length study, Emily Thornbury discerns the contours of a 'Southern mode' of late ninth- and tenth-century Old English poetry, marked by a modernized lexicon and Latinate style.[14] By combining Old English and Anglo-Latin evidence, Thornbury rebuts the presumption that 'poet' and 'poem' were privileged, idealized categories whose meanings changed little over time and across space. Instead, she posits contemporaneous 'poetic sub-dialects' corresponding to various communities, real or

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[11] Fulk and Cain, *A History of Old English Literature*, p. 294.

[12] For alliterative verse history, from Old English to Middle English, see Weiskott, *English Alliterative Verse*.

[13] Conner, 'The Structure of the Exeter Book Codex'.

[14] Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 265–85.

imagined.[15] Crucially, Thornbury's 'sub-dialects', while modelled on linguistic dialects, refer to interpretive rather than linguistic communities. In the context of the present volume, Thornbury's non-linguistic use of 'dialect' is useful insofar as it broaches the possibility of transregional communities organized around poetry and language.

Groupings such as Conner's booklets or Thornbury's Southern mode are unavailable for *Exodus*, which stands apart stylistically from the other biblical narratives in Junius 11 and represents the antithesis of the modernized Southern mode. (Given the poem's free-ranging adaptation of only a few verses from the biblical book, classifying *Exodus* as a biblical narrative is a bit like classifying James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* as a family saga.) Nevertheless, *Exodus* must belong to some particular poetic sub-dialect in Thornbury's usefully non-linguistic sense of the term. That the details of the sub-dialect cannot now be fully reconstructed is inconvenient, but it should do nothing to alter one's conviction that the details did in fact exist and may have left their traces on the text. The reality is not that the Old English poetic tradition was monolithic, but that the passage of time and the loss of manuscripts have worn away the supplementary information that researchers in later periods of literary history take for granted. Style, then, may be the sharpest remaining evidence of poets' motivations and audiences' expectations. The triangulation between poetic practices and the expectations that bind together poetic communities is complicated by the possibility of an idiosyncratic poet or a coterie audience. In this essay I approach such literary-historical questions from the inside out, using style to reconstruct an unknown community rather than using a known community to historicize style.

Wordplay in Old English has been an active field of research since the 1970s, focusing mainly on the poetry.[16] Studies of particular poems or groups of poems have revealed that poets took great pains to achieve etymological or pseudo-etymological paronomasia between alliterating words, especially proper names. Scholars have related Old English poets' use of paronomasia and the *ambiguum* to larger critical questions, such as the applicability of Milman

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[15] Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 247.

[16] Important contributions include Frank, 'Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse'; Hall, '*Mansceaðan*'; Allen, 'Name-Play and Structure in the Old English *Exodus*'; Stanley, *A Collection of Papers with Emphasis on Old English Literature*, pp. 318–35 (on the name *Geoweorþa* in the Old English *Orosius*); Zacher, 'Cynewulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality'; Thornbury, '"Ða Gregorius gamenode mid his wordum"'; and Novacich, 'The Old English *Exodus* and the Read Sea'.

Parry and Albert Lord's 'Oral-Formulaic Hypothesis' to Old English verse and
the influence of Latin exegetical practices on the *modus tractandi* of the scrip-
tural poems. From Bede's anecdote about Gregory, it is clear that punning in
early medieval England could do serious work.[17] Increasingly, scholars of Old
English literature are reminded to discard modern, nominalist conceptions of
punning as the trivial manipulation of arbitrary signs.

   This research subfield confronts many of the salient critical issues with which
the present volume is concerned. Research on wordplay in Old English reveals a
lively tradition of paronomasia in early medieval England, concentrated in but
extending beyond Old English verse, and it positions this tradition as a reflec-
tion of early medieval attitudes towards language and knowledge. As an unusu-
ally early and large medieval literary corpus, Old English literature represents
an important archive in the history of etymology as a literary-cultural practice
rather than a philosophical or linguistic theory. Moreover, Old English spe-
cialists have recognized wordplay as a tool of literary interpretation. Since the
1970s, students of Old English literature have become accustomed to listening
for puns in contexts in which they would not appear in modern writing. The
interpretation of a range of literary texts has been correspondingly enriched.

   Despite sustained attention to this topic within Old English studies, how-
ever, the meaning of paronomastic strategies remains incompletely under-
stood. What, precisely, were puns thought to accomplish, and by what means
did authors signal them or audiences apprehend them? The following investi-
gation of nautical puns in *Exodus* will not answer these questions directly, but
I hope to offer both a reorientation of the problem in terms of poetic style and
an illustration of what the study of style, in a fragmentary corpus, can reveal
about the practices of otherwise unknowable literary communities. I read
wordplay in *Exodus* as an indication of its author's attitudes towards language
and knowledge. At the same time, I seek to extrapolate from literary practice
to textual interpretation and from interpretation back to practice, confirm-
ing the importance of wordplay for the interpretation of Old English poetry
in general but also suggesting some ways in which a particular composition
reflects its (now lost) literary-cultural context. In the process, puns in *Exodus*
will emerge as significant literary strategies and crucial historical evidence. In
comparison with other Old English poems, wordplay in *Exodus* seems to me at

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[17] Frank, 'Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse', p. 207; and
Thornbury, '"Ða Gregorius gamenode mid his wordum"', pp. 17–19 and n. 9. Cf. the discussion
in the introduction to the present volume.

once more insistent and less obviously derivative of Latin exegetical modes. For that reason it may repay the individual treatment it receives in the remainder of this essay.

Morton Bloomfield's oft-quoted remark about William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (*c*. 1370–90), that it 'is like reading a commentary on an unknown text', cannot be said of the Old English *Exodus*.[18] For the main action of *Exodus* comes from the Old Testament book. What exercises and tasks critics of the poem is the first term of the dyad, the one that Bloomfield, writing of Langland, could take for granted. *Piers Plowman* reads like a commentary, but what does *Exodus* read like? Comparison to other Old English poems at least reveals some sensible things this poet was not doing — not versifying a biblical book, like *Genesis* (the poem only covers Exodus 13. 18–14. 31); not making Christian cosmology bite-sized, like *Order of the World*; not making a hero of a saint, like Cynewulf's *Elene*; not presenting a *persona*, like the *Seafarer*; not asking a difficult question, like the Riddles; not giving a clear answer, like the *Panther*. The combination of difficult poetic language and gestures at the finer points of biblical exegesis leaves modern readers with the uncomfortable sensation of half-understanding. A firmer grasp of the stylistic features that came naturally to the poet and his audience might enable us to read *Exodus* as a poem less radically open to interpretation, or at least one more intentionally and meaningfully indeterminate. Our ignorance is the more unfortunate, since there is a consensus that *Exodus* epitomizes Old English poetic style. Paradoxically, the poet eludes us by moving too fluently, speaking too idiomatically, doing too well whatever it is he meant to do.

Because we cannot begin with a date, an author, a place, or a genre, we must begin with words themselves. The *Exodus* poet delights in nautical terminology, epithets for the sea, and imaginative descriptions of the walls of water that offer egress to the Israelites and spell destruction for the Egyptians. The prevalence of nautical imagery in *Exodus* has induced many critics to see in the poem a typological allegory that casts Christians as seafarers voyaging upon the Ship of the Church.[19] In this view, by a series of figural substitutions of New for Old — Christ for Moses, the Holy Spirit for the pillar of cloud, the baptismal font for the Red Sea — the poet imbues his material with the significance of Christian salvation history. While the poet was clearly familiar with the bibli-

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[18] Bloomfield, *'Piers Plowman' as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse*, p. 32.

[19] Cross and Tucker, 'Allegorical Tradition and the Old English *Exodus*', pp. 124–25; Earl, 'Christian Traditions in the Old English *Exodus*', pp. 561–63; *Exodus*, ed. by Lucas, pp. 58, 67–69, and 89–90; and Portnoy, 'Ring Composition and the Digressions of *Exodus*', p. 293.

cal narrative and patristic commentary on its hidden allegorical dimensions, the play on seafaring in *Exodus* unsettles narrative expectations as much as it fulfils allegorical ones. Through repeated puns on the sea and seafaring, the poet saturates the text with startling incongruities: a ship sailing on the desert, walls made of water, a patriarch more capacious than a vessel. Concentrated in the poem's two so-called digressions and the portion of the narrative concerning the Israelites' journey across the desert, the nautical puns conjure oceans out of thin air. These oceans never develop into the baptismal font, nor the Red Sea itself, nor the bleak seascape of some other Old English poems. Like the *hwæl* (whale) that emerges from among the beasts of battle at verse 161a, in *Exodus* the sea has a tendency to burst forth unannounced.[20]

Before turning to individual examples, a note on the presentation of quotations. Because my literary arguments depend on the play between significations of individual Old English words, which would be lost in translation, I quote from *Exodus* in the original language. Quotations of *Exodus* are from Peter J. Lucas's valuable edition. After each quotation I provide my own Modern English translation, leaving pun-words in Old English. In block quotations and block translations, italics indicate pun-words.

Scholars agree that the first episode in the poem is very striking, but consensus ends there. The passage centers on a profusion of images:

> Dægsceldes hleo
> wand ofer wolcnum;   hæfde witig God
> sunnan siðfæt   *segle* ofertolden,
> swa þa mæstrapas   men ne cuðon,
> ne ða *seglrode*   geseon meahton
> eorðbuende   ealle cræfte,
> hu afæstnod wæs   feldhusa *mæst*,
> siððan He mid wuldre   geweorðode
> þeodenholde. (79ᵇ–87ᵃ)

[The covering(?) of the day-shield = sun(?) wound over the clouds; wise God had tented over the sun's path with a *segl*, so that earthdwelling men could not see the rigging nor the *seglrod* by any means, how the tents' *mæst* was fastened, when he honoured with glory those who remained loyal to their prince.]

Commentators note the extended nautical metaphor, variously identifying its referent as the true Church, the pillar of cloud, the Cross with banner, theo-

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[20] The word appears with asterisks to mark a lacuna in *ASPR*, ɪ, and *Exodus*, ed. by Irving. *Exodus and Daniel*, ed. by Blackburn, emends to *hwælmere* (sea).

logical *invisibilia*, and the advent of twilight. The nautical topos takes its place among a litany of metaphors — a shield, a net, a cloud, a veil, a tent — whose progression seems to combine the poetic, the exegetical, and the iconographic.[21] (The iconographic analogues to this passage serve as a reminder that medieval etymology could bleed over from the written word into other areas of cultural production.) Editors prefer to read *segle* (sail, veil) for the manuscript reading *swegle* (heaven), taking the latter as a scribal error or variant spelling of the former. If, as Bosworth and Toller's dictionary suggests, the forms *seg(e)l*, *sigel* (sun), and *sweg(e)l* can each be regarded as representing any of the others' meanings, then 'segle oftertolden' may be a most masterful pun.[22] God 'tents over' the heavens with a 'sail', a portion of the figural ship developed in the subsequent lines, or with a 'veil', an evocative description of evening. 'Segl' also recalls the *velum* of the Ark of the Covenant, whose associations with Noah's vessel reinforce the nautical theme. Latin *velum* itself means both 'sail' and 'veil'.[23] The poet, it would appear, has successfully calqued an exegetical pun. If *sigel* and *swegl* also chime in, they would have good company in the slew of references to sun, air, and sky in this section of the poem: 69a *Sigelwara* (sun-dwellers = Ethiopians), 71a *heofoncolum* (sky-coals = heat of the sun), 73b *heofon* (sky, heaven), 74b *lyft* (the air), 75a *wederwolcen* (fairweather cloud), 76a *uprodor* (the firmament), 78a *heofontorht* (heavenly bright), 80a *wolcnum* (clouds), 81a *sunnan* (sun), 90a *lyftwundor* (wonder in the air), and 94a *beorhtrodor* (the bright firmament). 'Segl' offers at least four significations, all potentially relevant to the narrative and typological contexts of this problem passage. God shields the Israelites with a 'sail' that is also a 'veil', or with the vault of the 'heavens' itself, on which blazes the deadly Egyptian 'sun'. Lacking an understanding of the raison d'être of *Exodus*, we cannot even decide which meaning is primary, and which is hinted at paronomastically. Perhaps, in this purple passage, the poet leaves off literal narration altogether, offering less a series of images than a series of ambiguous words for pious meditation.

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[21] See Frank, 'Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences Have a Skaldic Tooth?', pp. 339–42; Frank, 'What Kind of Poetry Is *Exodus*?', pp. 193–95; Wilcox, 'Creating the Cloud-Tent-Ship Conceit in *Exodus*'; Zacher, *Rewriting the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon Verse*, pp. 61–70; and Portnoy, 'Verbal Seascapes in Anglo-Saxon Verse', pp. 266–73.

[22] Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 'segl' ('a sail' or 'a veil' or 'a flag (?)'), lists 'swegel' and 'segel' as alternate spellings; at 'swegel' ('heaven'), the editors wonder: 'can *swegel* here = *segel*, *sigel* (q.v.)? cf. swegl = segl *a sail*', citing *Exodus* 105a; and at 'sigel' ('the sun'), the orthographical variants 'sægl' and 'segl' are offered.

[23] Lucas, 'The Cloud in the Interpretation of the Old English *Exodus*', pp. 305–06, and *Exodus*, ed. by Lucas, n. to 81.

The use of brilliant detail in metonymy has not sat well with all readers. That the hapax form *seglrod* should refer to something as mundane as a ship's beam provoked A. G. Brodeur to lament the proportions of the *Exodus* poet's long mixed metaphor.[24] Though 'sailyard' is likely to be the word's primary meaning, *seglrod* resembles three other hapax legomena in Old English verse: *Beowulf* 1429b *seglrad* (sail-riding = sea), *Husband's Message* 49b [*sigel*] [*rad*] (sun-riding = sky(?)), and *Riming Poem* 29a *sweglrad* (sun-riding = sky(?) or flute-modulation = music(?)).[25] The similarity between these high-minded (and mostly opaque) forms suggests that at least one of them was more than a poet's private concoction. Perhaps one of the others was available to the *Exodus* poet as a sounding-board, a sonic point of departure. In view of the nautical theme and the many references to the situation of God and the pillar high in the clouds, the meanings 'sea' and 'sky' would fit in well at 83a. Try as they might, the earth-dwellers could not see the 'sailyard' on which hung the pillar-as-sail, nor the 'sail-riding = sea' on which they sailed as figures of the pious Christian navigating a transitory secular existence, nor yet the 'sun-riding = sky' over which God spread his protective net. Characteristically, the poet expends more rhetorical effort on the invisible than the visible.

The phrase *feldhusa mæst* marks the beginning of a new typological metaphor, by which the Ship of the Church morphs into God's Tabernacle. After the extended nautical metaphor and especially *mæstrapas*, it is difficult not to hear *mæst* as 'mast' alongside 'most'. The word *afæstnod* (fastened) pertains equally well to tent poles and ship's masts.[26] Allusion to yet another item of seagoing paraphernalia seems appropriate at the junction between the two allegorical strategies. The Israelites cannot perceive how 'the great tent' of God's grace, or 'the tents' mast', is fastened. It is as though the mast of the Ship of the Church symbolically upholds the tents of the encampment, in parallel with the centre pole supporting the consummate tent that God spreads over his chosen people. If a singular mast for a plurality of tents seems architecturally suspect, this is

[24] Brodeur, 'A Study of Diction and Style in Three Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poems', p. 111.

[25] On the first, see Brady, 'The Synonyms for "Sea" in *Beowulf*', pp. 26 and 39, and Brady, 'The Old English Nominal Compounds in -*rád*', pp. 562–64. On the second, see Nicholson, 'The Old English Rune for *S*', p. 318, and Niles, 'The Trick of the Runes in *The Husband's Message*'. On the third, see Brady, 'The Old English Nominal Compounds in *rád*', pp. 546–49; *The Old English Riming Poem*, ed. and trans. by Macrae-Gibson, p. 45; and Stanley, *A Collection of Papers with Emphasis on Old English Literature*, pp. 115–38 (p. 125).

[26] Compare *Beowulf* 1905–06a: 'Þa wæs be *mæste* merehrægla sum | segl sale *fæst*' (Then a sea-garment, a sail, was made fast to the mast with rope).

because the poet sets out to combine apples and oranges, the unity of God's grace and the multiplicity of his creatures. The same strange superimposition of registers occurs at 133a and 223a *flotan feldhusum* (in the crew's tents), once again painting the Israelites as sailor-campers. For someone, for some reason, there was cachet in not merely juxtaposing but alchemically combining two elements of poetic discourse.

At the coast at last, Moses expounds the power of his rod in a kind of performative utterance, one of many speeches without analogue in the biblical source:

> Yð up færeð,   ofstum wyrceð
> wæter on wealfæsten.   *Wegas* syndon dryge,
> haswe herestræta,   holm gerymed,
> ealde staðolas. (282–85ᵃ)

[The wave rises; it quickly builds the sea into a bulwark. The *wegas* are dry, an ashen street for an army; the ocean is opened up, old foundations.]

Moses compares the parted sea to a *burh* (fortification), to streets, and to fields (*wealfæsten*, *herestræta*, 287a *feldas*, etc.), interlocking metaphors that will be continually taken up in the remainder of the poem.[27] Amid so much oceanic hustle and bustle, *wegas* (paths) calls to mind its near-homophone and variant spelling *wægas* (waves).[28] 'The waves are dry' would be oxymoronic in any other context, but here it seems a clever description of events, elaborated by the vertigo-inducing variation *herestræta* (army paths) – *holm* (sea) – *staðolas* (foundations, pillars). The effect is less an apt comparison than an interruption of the normal rules of reality. The Red Sea has become a pillar-lined thoroughfare (cf. Exodus 14. 22: 'erat enim aqua quasi murus' (for the water was like a wall) and 14. 29 'et aquæ eis erant quasi pro muro' (and the waters were like a wall unto them)), but, just as viscerally, it remains a sea. Like Langland, the *Exodus* poet had a penchant for blurring the distinctions between diegesis and exegesis. More disturbingly, the sea-change is not merely described by Moses but performed by him, word by word. Paronomasia works a strong magic indeed. The

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[27] Frank, 'What Kind of Poetry Is *Exodus*?', pp. 197–201, and Ferhatović, '*Burh* and *Beam*, Burning Bright'.

[28] In Anglo-Saxon orthography, the symbols *æ* and *e* are somewhat interchangeable: Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, § 49 and § 328. Campbell, § 48, notes the relative fixity of spellings of long vowels, but *weg* for 'wave' does in fact occur, e.g., *Beowulf* 1907a and 3132b. 'Wave' and 'way' are both strong masculine nouns, and so their inflectional endings are identical. They both derive from Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 'u̯eĝh-' ('convey').

dizzying inversion of landscape testifies to God's power over the natural world and suggests how New Testament meanings may burst forth from Old. Later the poet offers compounds like 289a *sægrundas* (sea fields), 302b *sæweall* (sea wall), and 468b *holmweall* (oceanic wall), making explicit the combination of irreconcilable entities. In other Old English poems *sægrund*, *sæweall*, and the like refer to the sea by metaphorical reference to the land (cf. *sæhengest* (sea-horse = ship)), but the *Exodus* poet renovates these familiar metaphors by deploying them literally. Evidently this poet wrote at a time when the sea-as-land conceit had already begun to harden into a cliché, and for an audience able to appreciate the repetition with difference. Whether this time was before *c.* 825, as maintained by R. D. Fulk on the basis of several linguistic-metrical tests with their attendant assumptions about the shape of metrical evolution, or rather later, when skaldic poetry was well known in England, as suggested by Frank, it is difficult to say.[29]

In the opening of the so-called patriarchal digression, Noah figures as an intrepid sea captain navigating an unfathomable Flood:

> Niwe flodas   Noe oferlað,
> þrymfæst þeoden,   mid his þrim sunum,
> þone deopestan   drencefloda
> þara ðe gewurde   on woruldrice.
> Hæfde him on hreðre   halige *treowa*;
> forþon he gelædde   ofer lagustreamas
> maðmhorda mæst,   mine gefræge. (362–68)

[Noah, illustrious chief, sailed across new waters with his three sons — the deepest deluge that [ever] happened in the kingdom of the world. He had holy *treowa* in his breast, for he led over the ocean streams the greatest treasure hoard, as I have heard.]

Noah's precious cargo is *treowa* (covenants, faith, truth, or wooden beams).[30] The poet does not mention the Ark, for Noah has replaced it as the vehicle of

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[29] Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter*, § 421; Frank, 'Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences Have a Skaldic Tooth?'; and Frank, 'What Kind of Poetry Is *Exodus*?'.

[30] The ambiguity involves the accusative plural of *a*-stem neuter *treow* (tree, wood) and the accusative plural of *o*-stem feminine *treow* (truth, faith). The view of *Exodus*, ed. by Lucas, n. to 366 and glossary, 'treow', that *treowa* represents the accusative singular depends more on that editor's insistence on a typological reading of *Exodus* than on the grammatical and ortho-graphical possibilities. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §§570–84, gives the accusative plural of *a*-stem neuters as *u*, but notes (§ 49 and § 377) that the spellings *u*, *o*, and *a* for word-final short back vowels were interchangeable in the Old English period. Campbell, §§585–98, gives

the faith, charged with conveying what is good from the old dispensation to the new. The material sense of *treow* underlines the implicit comparison between Noah's body and his vessel. Not only does he bear 'covenants', 'faith', and 'truth' across the cataclysmic waters, but he carries 'wooden beams in his breast', like a ship.[31] In the poet's hands ineffable virtues metamorphose into mere carpenter's stuff, and then a 'treasure hoard', as though to freight Noah's voyage with all the gallantry of a pagan ship burial. The figural equivalence between the Ark, the Church, and the wood of the Cross was emphasized by early Christian authors, as when St Augustine remarks of Noah's Ark in *De civitate Dei*, 'Beyond doubt, this is a figure of the city of God travelling in this world, that is, of the Church, which is saved by the wood (*lignum*) on which hung the mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus'.[32] Allusions that seem discordant to modern ears, trained as they are to distinguish secular from religious literature, are alloyed to one another nimbly and nonchalantly by our poet. The word *mæst* might contain an echo of 'mast' as above, undergirding the nautical scene. Or again, *treowa* and *maðmhorda* might refer to the Ark itself, the former by synecdoche and the latter by metonymy. In this interpretation the Ark as wooden vessel embodies the 'covenants', 'faith', 'truth', or 'treasure hoard' that Noah delivers to the post-diluvian world, though the physics of the scene have been strangely inverted: Noah carries the Ark within himself. In both cases, the pun on *treowa* literalizes disorienting metaphors.

The second half of the patriarchal digression concerns Abraham and Isaac. When Abraham makes to strike his firstborn, the voice of an angel interrupts him: 'Þa him *styran* cwom *stefn* of heofonum' (417, Then a *stefn* came from

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the accusative plural of *o*-stem feminines, including *treow* (truth), as *a*, while the accusative singular ending is always *e*. In any event nothing prevents one from understanding *treowa* (covenants) as notionally singular, for *treow* is 'sometimes used in the plural with the force of the singular' (Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 'treów, trýw'). *Treo* (tree) and *treow* (truth) both derive from Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 'deru-' ('firm'). The two words remained productively ambiguous into the twelfth century. Lawman puns on them in his alliterative verse chronicle *Brut* (*c*. 1200), 10338: '*treo* uppen oðer *treo*-liche faste' (one tree on another diligently and quickly).

[31] Old English epithets for 'ship' often refer to wood, e.g., *Andreas* 905b *wudubate* and *Beowulf* 208a *sundwudu*, 216b *wudu*, and 226a *sæwudu*. *Rune Poem* 77–80 defines *ac* (oak) synecdochically as a ship and offers its own pun on *treow* (80b): Hall, 'Perspective and Wordplay in the Old English *Rune Poem*', p. 456.

[32] Augustine, *De civitate Dei Libri XI–XXII* 15.26, ed. by Dombart and Kalb: 'Procul dubio figura est peregrinantis in hoc saeculo ciuitatis dei, hoc est ecclesiae, quae fit salua per lignum, in quo pependit mediator dei et hominum, homo Christus Iesus'. Translation mine. I thank Mikael Males for drawing my attention to this passage.

heaven to *styran* him), corresponding to Genesis 22. 11: 'Et ecce angelus Domini de cælo clamavit' (And behold, the angel of God cried from heaven). Of the many ways he might have rendered the Vulgate, the poet selected an alliterating pair that offers a twofold nautical pun. The literal sense of *styran* (steer (a vessel)) underlies its common abstract meanings 'govern', 'restrain', and 'rebuke', and the technical sense of *stefn* (prow, stern (of a ship)) accompanies other relevant significations, such as 'voice'; 'summons'; 'stem', used figuratively of God in the Old English prose *Boethius* (late ninth/tenth c.) in the sense 'foundation'; and 'time', in the idiomatic expression *niwan stefne* (anew).[33] The metaphor of governance lies behind both words, the verb *stefnan* being a synonym of *styran*. In poetry, *stefn* and *styran* and their derivatives often appear in collocation with reference to seafaring.[34] The two words' nautical connotations lend a figural depth to God's intervention. A 'voice', or a 'summons', or God the 'foundation', or a 'prow' — even perhaps '(a second) time', the New Word latent in the Old — comes to Abraham to 'steer', 'govern', 'restrain', or 'rebuke' him. The poet exploits the polysemy of *styran* and *stefn* to suggest a variety of master–servant relationships between God and Abraham, including steersman and rudder. Out from amid the preamble to a speech sails a heavenly ship, laden with typological import and yet unexampled in the poet's scriptural source.

Such is the imaginative power of *Exodus* that even its textual cruces seem to hide unplumbed depths of meaning. As the Red Sea closes in upon the Egyptians, the poet remarks:

> Mægen wæs on cwealme
> fæste gefeterod,   forðganges *nep*,

[33] Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 'stefn, stemn, es; *m*' (two lemmata); 'stefn, stæmn, stemn, e; *f*'; 'stefn, e; *f*'; and 'steóran'. The phrase *niwan stefne* appears only in verse. It appears in explicitly New Testament contexts in *Andreas* 123a (Matthew) and *Elene* 1060a (Judas) and 1127a (Kyriakos); and in explicitly patriarchal contexts in *Genesis* 1555b (Noah) and 1886 (Abraham). For play on *niwan stefne* in *Elene*, see Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*, pp. 46–62 ('new voice'); and Zacher, 'Cynewulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality', pp. 375–76 ('new voice', 'new Stephen'). Both *stefn* and *steoran* derive from Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 'stā' ('stand'). The sense 'foundation' occurs at *Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine, I, 473–74: 'And þeah is an God, se is stemn and staðol eallra goda' (However, there is one God, who is stem and foundation of all good things), with paronomasia on 'God'/'good'.

[34] Compare *Andreas* 495a '*steoran* ofer *stæfnan*' (steer above the stern); *Gifts of Men* 54a '*stefnan steoreð*' (steers by the stern); *Order of the World* 45 'stiðe *stefn*byrd swa him se *steora* bibead' (a stiff regulation, as the pilot commanded him: metaphorical for God); and *Solomon and Saturn* 51a '*stefnum steoreð*' (steers by the prows).

searwum asæled. (469^b–71^a)

[The army was fettered fast to destruction, *nep*(?) of progress, ingeniously bound.]

Scholars do not agree whether the manuscript reading *nep* represents an Old English word or a scribal blunder, or, if it is a word, what it means.[35] The most forceful case for its status as a genuine hapax legomenon is made in the *OED Online*, 'neap, *adj.* and *n.*¹', which recommends 'the basic sense "lacking power, enfeebled"'. As the editors of the *OED* note, if *nep* is an adjective it ought to be connected with Old English *nepflod* (neap tide), whose origins are equally murky. In lieu of further evidence, it is worth observing that a nautical colouring for *nep* would suit the context and resonate with the other puns in the poem. Whether an abstract meaning 'enfeebled' developed from the technical sense 'neap (tide)', or the weak tide was dubbed *nep* meaning 'feeble', hence 'low' (cf. *Dictionary of Old English* Online, 'fylleþ-flod' 'spring tide'), allusion to the tidal cycle befits the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. 'Fettered fast' and 'ingeniously bound' by God's righteous wrath, the Egyptians are 'powerless to proceed', 'at the low tide of their progress', as it were, doomed to stand by as the walls of water rush back together on top of them. There is grim humour in measuring the Egyptians' predicament in terms of *forðgang* (progress), a word exactly equivalent to Latin *processus* and Greek ἔξοδος. *Forðgang*, as well as its derivatives *forðgangan* (proceed) and *forðgenge* (progressing), are found elsewhere only in prose and Latin–Old English glosses, suggesting that the poet has imported a technical non-poetic word for its exegetical connotations. The possible pun on 'neap tide' recapitulates the action, converting understatement to physical comedy at the Egyptians' expense.

Before dismissing the Egyptians for good (515b, 'Hie wið God wunnon'; They contended with God), the poet lands one last rhetorical blow:

forðam þæs heriges   ham eft ne com
ealles *ungrundes*   ænig to lafe
þætte sið heora   secgan moste. (508–10)

[because not one of that army, completely *ungrundes*, returned home who might tell of their journey.]

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[35] *Exodus and Daniel*, ed. by Blackburn, n. to 470 (retains *nep*, with reservations); Thomas, 'The O.E. "Exodus"', pp. 344–45 (adduces ON *hneppr* (scant)); *ASPR*, I, n. to 470 (emends to *weg* (path)); *Exodus*, ed. by Irving, n. to 470 (retains *nep*); Irving, 'New Notes on the Old English *Exodus*', pp. 317–18 (emends to *neh* (near (to)), *contra* his earlier opinion); and *Exodus*, ed. by Lucas, n. to 470b (retains *nep*).

Not a single Egyptian will live to tell the tale (cf. Exodus 14. 28, 'nec unus qui-dem superfuit ex eis'; nor did any one of them survive). Though their army is *ungrund* (immense), it is also *ungrund* (bottomless), having been summarily washed off the temporary road through the Red Sea. Built on the model of *ungemet* (immense) and *unrim* (countless), the hapax form *ungrund* may be the poet's own coinage, a verbal expedient for a scathing double entendre.[36] Nearly all the significations of *sið* seem relevant: 'travel', 'voyage', 'expedition', 'course of action', 'course of events', 'condition', 'path'. The *Exodus* poet's careful selection of the appropriate word is one expression of a highly controlled *modus tractandi*.

Though most of the puns identified above involve significations of individual words, or different words belonging to the same part of speech, it is insufficient to treat wordplay in narrowly grammatical and syntactical terms. Some puns cannot be translated neatly into two meanings. For example, if a depressive sailor *yawls*, the joke is clear, despite the incompatibility of noun and verb. 'The tents' mast' defies grammatical exposition, and yet there is the mast all the same, peeking out from the camping metaphor. The *Exodus* poet's verbal adventurousness enticed him beyond the (Latin) grammatical categories with which he would have been familiar.

Nautical puns in the Old English *Exodus* illustrate the continuum that connected etymology and wordplay in early medieval Europe. As we have seen, some of the instances of wordplay in *Exodus* appear to reflect patristic interpretations of Old Testament history as Christian allegory. Thus the play on *treowa* at 366b likely reflects the typological equation of the Ark of the Covenant, Noah's Ark, and the Cross. In playing one meaning against another, the poet may have understood himself to be participating in a tradition of biblical commentary. Yet puns in *Exodus* are far from systematic, either in themselves or in the poetic effects derived from them. They appear without any explanatory apparatus or indeed any unequivocal acknowledgment. Within the wider field of early medieval etymology surveyed in the present volume, *Exodus* marks a limit case in the etymology–wordplay dynamic. The *Exodus* poet never renders the forms or sounds of words as explicitly significant as Gregory does in Bede's anecdote, or as Norse writers did in discussing the interpretation of dreams. On the one hand, the nautical puns in the poem come very close to pure wordplay, set apart both from etymology as an early medieval epistemic formation and even from the narrative arc of the poet's ostensible source text. On the other

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[36] But cf. *Riming Poem* 49a *ungrynde* (bottomless) and the more common adjective *grundleas* (bottomless, immense). See also Michelet, 'Lost at Sea', p. 70.

hand, the deployment of nautical puns clearly carried important interpretive overtones for this poet, so that his very distance from the realm of Isidorean etymology expresses its pervasive influence on his thought and poetic practice.

A master craftsman, the *Exodus* poet was never satisfied with a simple scene. He layered, fused, and elaborated, preferring allusion to exposition. Like (Anglo-)Scandinavian skalds, he revelled in a sophisticated poetic code whose contortions elude us more often than we would like. The nautical world furnished him with a context and a pretext. It may be that this sort of accretive paronomasia, like kennings and poetic variation, was felt to be proper to poetic discourse. Puns in Old English poetry seem to signal a high and serious style, even if we moderns no longer 'catch our breath at the places where the breath was always caught'.[37] Paronomastic play between different exegetical commonplaces may be an important indicator of what kind of poetry *Exodus* is and what kind of action it is supposed to effect on its source text. The umbrella terms 'scriptural poetry' and 'Old Testament verse' seem insufficiently precise in this case. The *Exodus* poet's facility with nautical terminology, which suits but also exceeds the conventions of early medieval exegesis, resembles neither *Andreas*, with its intrepid sea-scenes, nor the three religious poems that accompany *Exodus* in Junius 11. We end, then, where we began, moving from words to conjectures about the communities that elicited and commended them. The most idiomatic poem of a most idiomatic literary tradition, *Exodus* flaunts its puns in a way that suggests the poet expected them to be savoured.

[37] Stoppard, *The Invention of Love*, p. 36.

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Etymological Interpretation of Dreams in Old Icelandic Literature

Mikael Males

As in other medieval vernaculars, wordplay played an important role in Old Icelandic literature. Most famously, perhaps, the gods of the North were called *æsir* (sing. *áss*), and this name was connected to their origin in Asia (*Ásía*). No causal relationship is ever explicitly spelled out (such as 'the *æsir* were so called because they came from Asia' or the like), but rather, it seems that this went without saying. Consider, for instance, a passage in *Heimskringla* (the history of the kings of Norway) by Snorri Sturluson:

> Fyrir austan Tanakvísl í Ásía var kallat Ásaland eða Ásaheimr, en hǫfuðborgin, er var í landinu, kǫlluðu þeir Ásgarð.[1]

> [East of the Don in Asia they called the land Ásaland [land of the *æsir*] or Ásaheimr [world of the *æsir*], and the main city in that land they called Ásgarðr [city of the *æsir*].]

Just before, Snorri has said that Tanais (Don) was earlier called Tanakvísl or Vanakvísl and that the land about it was called Vanaland or Vanaheimr. The *vanir* was the other family of gods, who eventually intermarried with the *æsir*.

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[1] *Heimskringla*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ɪ, 11. The implicit connection between the *æsir* and *Ásía* is made also in the Prologue to Snorri's *Edda* and in the Third Grammatical Treatise (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, ed. by Faulkes, pp. 6, 57; *Den tredje og fjærde grammatiske*, ed. by Björn M. Ólsen, p. 60). Translations of Old Norse and Latin are mine.

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Through the paronyms *áss* and *Ásía* (as well as the somewhat less obvious Tanais and *vanir*), the Old Norse version of ancestry from Troy could thus be bolstered by the very name of the gods.

In poetry, wordplay was used in a demanding form of circumlocution called *ofljóst* (too clear).[2] The typical Icelandic saga is prosimetrical in form, and the poetry is, for the most part, of the kind called *skaldic*. Skaldic poetry is by far the most inaccessible portion of the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus, with complex metre and diction; circumlocutions — so called kennings — are ubiquitous and often difficult to unravel. Thus, for instance, 'the tree of the sword' means 'warrior' and 'the fire of the sea' means 'gold'. In *ofljóst*, however, this is only the first semantic transfer for arriving at the correct referent. A stanza from *Grettis saga* may serve as an example. When the hero Grettir is reporting how he swam under a waterfall he finishes the stanza by saying:

> Heldr kom á herðar skáldi
> hǫrð fjón Braga kvónar.[3]

[The rather powerful enmity of the wife of Bragi came down upon the shoulders of the poet [me].]

The wife of the god Bragi is Iðunn; *Iðunnar* in the genitive. Thus, the first decoding of the kenning *Braga kvónar* (of Bragi's wife) gives *Iðunnar* (of Iðunn), that is, 'the powerful enmity of Iðunn'. This is obviously nonsense in the context of swimming under a waterfall, but the definite form of the genitive of the word *iða* (whirling stream) is also *iðunnar*, and this word denotes the correct referent. The final reading, then, is

> The rather powerful enmity of the whirling stream came down upon the shoulders of the poet [me].

These two examples — *áss/Ásía* and *ofljóst* — show that the functions of wordplay in Old Icelandic literature were both varied and sophisticated. It may, however, be less well known that there is another context where what may loosely be called etymological method — whereby I here intend the use of wordplay for establishing the true meaning of a motif — is commonly employed, namely in the interpretation of dreams. Thus, for instance, if the dreamer arrives at

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[2] The name presumably indicates that the first decoding leads to a referent that is 'too clear' in that the true referent is still at one step's remove.

[3] *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, BII, 473.43; *Grettis saga*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, p. 271.

a place called Þrot, the interpreter understands that he will come to an end (*þrotna*) (a full description of the phenomenon follows below). Such devices are common in Old Icelandic, but not, it should be noted, in Old Norwegian literature. The language of both countries was the same, and their literature is often seen as a single entity, referred to as *Old Norse* or *Old Norse-Icelandic* literature. As we shall see, though, Icelandic and Norwegian literature must in the present context be kept apart, and the absence of etymological interpretation in Norwegian literature carries some implications for the reconstruction of its historical background.

Although wordplay in dreams in Old Icelandic literature has been noticed from time to time, only one brief overview of five pages has ever been produced — by Wilhelm Henzen in 1890 (whose remarks attracted the eye of no less a critic than Sigmund Freud).[4] As to why wordplay occurs in dreams, Henzen writes that 'the symbolic nature of the dream thus also appears in this predilection for ambiguous expressions and words'.[5] The quotation shows that Henzen accords more weight to wordplay in dreams than mere punning, but he makes no connection to the etymological method as a tool for interpretation or to other uses of such devices in Old Icelandic literature.

In medieval Europe, works treating the interpretation of dreams can be divided into two groups. One comprises late antique theoretical treatises on how dreams relate to foreknowledge and the Divine, and they allow for flexibility in the interpretation. The second group are the so-called dreambooks, practical treatises that give no leeway to interpretive creativity.

The most influential non-patristic treatise in the first group is Macrobius's commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*.[6] In this Neoplatonic work, dreams are ordered into five tiers, according to their connectedness to the Divine and thus to truth beyond individual, psychological impulses. Probably more influential still were the classifications of dreams and visions by St Augustine and Gregory the Great. In Christian hands, demonic temptation was added as a possible source of dreams, producing a scale that ranged not only from significant to insignificant and confusing, but also from true and good to false and

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[4] Freud somewhat exaggerates Henzen's observations when writing: 'die altnordische Sagaliteratur, in der sich kaum ein Traumbeispiel ohne Doppelsinn oder Wortspiel findet' (Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, p. 277).

[5] Henzen, *Über die Träume in der Altnordischen Sagalitteratur*, p. 45: 'die symbolische Natur des Traumes offenbart sich also auch in dieser Liebe für doppelsinnige Wendungen und Worte'.

[6] Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, pp. 62–63.

dangerous. (Dreams emanating from demons were not necessarily understood as false, but were always considered to be sent with malicious intent.)[7]

The second group, the so-called dreambooks, comprises three types of works.[8] They are derived from late antique Greek tradition, and the earliest Latin manuscripts of the most influential one, the *Somniale Danielis*, date to the ninth century.[9] Little is known of their possible preceding development in the West. The first type, the 'dream alphabet', consists of a list of potential dream significations tied to the letters of the alphabet. The dreamer would open some book, and the first letter he came across would indicate the meaning of the dream as given in the 'dream alphabet', also called *Somniale Ioseph*. The second kind, the 'dreamlunar', gave interpretations according to the phase of the moon in which the dream occurred. The third and most popular type, the 'dreambook proper', known as *Somniale Danielis* or by similar names involving the prophet Daniel, fixed certain meanings to given motifs — losing teeth would for instance signify losing relatives — and is thus the only dreambook that takes the content of dreams into account.

Of the two groups, only the *Somniale Danielis* is likely to have exerted some influence on descriptions of dreams in Old Icelandic narrative. A translation into Old Icelandic exists in a manuscript of *c.* 1500, but it is not clear when the original translation was made.[10] In any event, the simple Latin of the *Somniale Danielis* would be readily accessible to many medieval readers. It is noteworthy that one of the most common types of dreams in the sagas and in the *Somniale Danielis* alike is one where enemies in the form of animals occur, but this is enough of a commonplace in European dream and vision literature that direct influence need not be posited.[11] For the present purposes, two other examples of probable influence from the *Somniale Danielis* are instructive of how its inter-

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[7] Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, pp. 43–53, 59–62.

[8] See Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, pp. 7–16.

[9] *'Somniale Danielis'*, ed. by Martin, pp. 1–2; Förster, 'Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Volkskunde IV', pp. 39–42; Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, pp. 290–302.

[10] Turville-Petre, 'An Icelandic Version of the "Somniale Danielis"', p. 27.

[11] See Turville-Petre, 'An Icelandic Version of the "Somniale Danielis"', pp. 27–31. For dreams of animals symbolizing enemies in the *Somniale Danielis*, see *'Somniale Danielis'*, ed. by Martin, pp. 100 (item 12), 110 (56), 111 (61), 124 (102), 142 (173), 160 (251), 163 (267). Famous instances of animals symbolizing enemies occur in, for instance, the *Song of Roland* and in the *Visio Merlini*; for a discussion of the content of Charlemagne's dreams in the *Song of Roland*, see Steinmeyer, *Untersuchungen zur allegorischen Bedeutung der Träume im altfranzösischen Rolandslied*.

pretations seem to have been adapted to local taste. In *Laxdæla saga*, Þorkell Eyjólfsson, husband of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, dreamt that his beard covered all of Breiðafjǫrðr. He interpreted his own dream to mean that he would hold sway over all the area surrounding the fjord, and this is in accordance with the *Somniale*: 'barbam prolixam habere significat fortitudinem vel potestatem' (to have a long beard signifies fortitude or power). His wife, however, knew better, namely that he would drown in the fjord.[12]

In *Vatnsdæla saga*, to be discussed below, another Þorkell dreams that he is riding a red horse, and he interprets this to mean that his prospects are good. Again, this is true to the *Somniale*, and again, his wife has a more gloomy interpretation which turns out to be right.[13]

As seen from these examples, Old Norse authors were often not satisfied with such straightforward explanations as may be found in the *Somniale*; rather, they opted for psychological and referential complexity. Such a flexible mode of interpretation, as opposed to the fixed one of the dreambooks, is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of the first book of Macrobius's commentary and is there explicitly linked to allegorical interpretation of myth (*narrationes fabulosae*). In laying out his programme for the interpretation of myth and dreams alike, Macrobius writes:

> De dis autem (ut dixi) ceteris et de anima non frustra se nec ut oblectent ad fabulosa convertunt, sed quia sciunt inimicam esse naturae apertam nudamque expositionem sui, quae sicut vulgaribus hominum sensibus intellectum sui vario rerum tegmine operimentoque subtraxit, ita a prudentibus arcana sua voluit per fabulosa tractari.[14]

> [Regarding the other gods, as I said, and regarding the soul, they [the Greeks] turn to the fabulous neither in vain nor [merely] to delight, but because they know that an open and nude exposition of herself is harmful to nature. Just as she removed understanding of herself from the senses of vulgar people by a varied cover or coating, so she willed that her secrets be treated through fabulous narratives by the wise.]

According to Macrobius, this state of affairs applies not only to myth, but also to the highest order of meaningful dreams, which must thus be interpreted according to circumstances. The connection between allegorical interpretation of fiction and dreams is also drawn by several of Macrobius's followers, the most

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[12] Turville-Petre, 'An Icelandic Version of the "Somniale Danielis"', p. 28.

[13] Turville-Petre, 'An Icelandic Version of the "Somniale Danielis"', p. 29; *'Somniale Danielis'*, ed. by Martin, pp. 122–23 (items 97, 100, +57 and variants).

[14] Macrobius, *Commentarii in somnium Scipionis*, ed. by Willis, p. 7.

relevant example here being that of Pascalis Romanus (twelfth century), who uses words generally connected to allegorical interpretation of scripture and myth in his discussion of dreams (*integumentum*, *figura*, *involucrum*, *ambages*, *umbra*), saying that scripture, and particularly the Old Testament, contains the shadow of natural dreams, requiring us to investigate 'not the image and body of the letter, but rather the spirit and the truth that is signified' ('non ymaginem et corpus littere sed spiritum et significatam veritatem').[15]

I am not here suggesting any influence from Pascalis Romanus on Old Icelandic saga literature, but refer to him as an example of how complex dreams, like scripture, could be seen as demanding allegorical exposition. Though such an opinion is never explicitly voiced in Old Icelandic literature, the treatment of complex and potentially multivalent dreams indicates that they were perceived in much the same way. Within Latin and Old Icelandic literature alike, then, dreams and texts were interpreted by similar procedures.

The figure of the interpreter looms large in Old Icelandic literature, whether of allegorical signifiers in dreams or of convoluted language in skaldic poetry. Outside of the sphere of dreams and poetry, though, the absence of explicit interpretation is as conspicuous as its presence within it. Authorial voice is on the whole repressed, but dreams and skaldic poetry allow it to come to the fore through the mouths of the protagonists, and when it does, it turns out that saga authors had as strong an opinion as any on how readers should understand their texts.

These general observations on dreams in Old Icelandic literature do not, however, explain the function of wordplay in them, or why more of it should be found there than elsewhere in the literature.

As far as I have been able to detect, the use of wordplay for the interpretation of dreams is not directly derived from the Latin tradition; it is not found in Latin works that were known in Iceland, nor in medieval literature on dreams generally. Interpretation of dreams and visions in the Latin tradition is, on the whole, visual or at least extralinguistic. Wordplay is not used in the Vulgate (there are no explicit arguments to this effect and, furthermore, Jerome's literal translation is not calculated to retain any of the wordplay that may be found in the Hebrew or the Greek) or in the dreambooks.[16] Neither is it found in

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[15] Quoted in Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 134.

[16] For a comprehensive description of Jerome's literal translations of sacred texts (as opposed to his approximate translations of other texts), see Cuendet, 'Cicéron et Saint Jérôme traducteurs'. For a brief overview of wordplay in the Hebrew Bible, see Guillaume, 'Paronomasia in the Old Testament'. The most famous example of wordplay in the Greek is, perhaps, John 3. 3 and

the writings about dreams of Macrobius, St Augustine, or Aristotle.[17] Finally, I have not found such interpretation to be prominent in the rich medieval dream and vision literature.

The only passage that I have come across in such Latin literature as is likely to have had some impact in Iceland and where interpretation based on specific words is in some way associated with the interpretation of dreams is found in the book of Daniel. As we have seen, the *Somniale Danielis* was by far the most popular of the dreambooks, its name attesting to Daniel's position as the interpreter par excellence. More specifically, one of the short stories in the Separate saga of Saint Óláfr (*Rauðs þáttr*) contains a dream which is clearly modelled on Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the idol with feet of clay in the book of Daniel.[18] The story is contained in two manuscripts from about 1300 and two more from the early fourteenth century, and three branches of the stemma are represented. This spread indicates that the story must probably have been composed no later than *c.* 1250, and Gabriel Turville-Petre believes it to be a product of the twelfth century.[19] Even with a somewhat later dating, though, the story shows that influence from the book of Daniel can be traced back to a relatively early stage of Old Icelandic literature.

The book of Daniel is all about interpretation, mainly of dreams and visions. First, two dreams come to Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel interprets them both. Later, Daniel himself has several dreams and visions and is guided to their interpretation by angels. Between these groups of dreams, and as a link in the chain of dreamlike occurrences begging interpretation, is the famous handwriting on the wall in the palace of Balthazar, son of Nebuchadnezzar.

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3. 17 (though not related to dreams). When discussing rebirth with Nicodemus, Jesus uses the adverb ἄνωθεν, which can mean both 'again' and 'from above'. Nicodemus understands Jesus's words as merely physical (to be born again) and overlooks the spiritual reference contained in the meaning 'from above'. The ambiguity is lost in the *Vulgate* (the translation there is *denuo* (again)). The fact that Jerome chose a literal mode of translation does not mean that he was insensitive to wordplay in the source language; Guillaume, 'Paronomasia in the Old Testament', p. 290, comments on an instance where the Vulgate is the only translation to take wordplay into account.

[17] For an overview, see Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*. The *Somniale Danielis*, though it has much in common with some dreams in the sagas in other regards, does not use etymological arguments (see *'Somniale Danielis'*, ed. by Martin; Turville-Petre, 'An Icelandic Version of the "Somniale Danielis"').

[18] *The Story of Rauð and his Sons*, trans. by Turville-Petre, pp. 7–8; Daniel 2. 31–45.

[19] *The Story of Rauð and his Sons*, trans. by Turville-Petre, pp. 9–15; Sigurður Nordal, *Om Olaf den helliges saga*, pp. 86–89; *Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga*, ed. by Johnsen and Jón Helgason, pp. 655–82, 1129–31.

At a grand feast, Balthazar and his followers drank from the gold and silver vessels that had been brought from the temple in Jerusalem, and while drinking they praised their gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. Suddenly, a hand appeared, writing on the wall. Struck with terror, the king ordered that the magi and soothsayers be brought in, and he promised great rewards to any who could read and interpret the script. As it turned out, none of the sages could do so, until Daniel was brought to the palace. After delivering a brief lesson on monotheism, Daniel proceeds to both reading and interpreting the text:

> Haec est autem scriptura quae digesta est: *mane*, *thecel*, *fares*. Et haec interpretatio sermonis: *mane* — numeravit Deus regnum tuum et conplevit illud; *thecel* — adpensus es in statera et inventus es minus habens; *fares* — divisum est regnum tuum et datum est Medis et Persis.

> [This is the script that has been arranged: *mane*, *thecel*, *fares*. And this is the interpretation of the message: *mane* — God has measured your kingdom and finished it; *thecel* — you have been weighed in the scales and found wanting; *fares* — your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.]

It will come as no surprise that Balthazar is slain the very same night and that Darius the Mede succeeds to the kingdom. How exactly Daniel went about interpreting the words is somewhat obscure. In his commentary on Daniel, Jerome writes: '*Mane, Thecel, Phares*, quorum primum *numerum*, secundum *appensionem*, tertium *divisionem* sonat' (Mane, Thecel, Phares, whereof the first sounds like 'number', the second like 'suspension', and the third like 'division').[20]

It is beyond my scope here to delve into the difficulties surrounding these Aramaic words; medieval scholars would in any case have been poorly equipped to do so and would have to base their understanding on the biblical text alone or on a commentary such as Jerome's. What stands out here is rather the procedure of interpretation; the clues lie in single words that, when correctly expounded upon, yield the right interpretation.

As we shall see, word-based interpretation of dreams in Old Icelandic literature takes on a different, explicitly paronomastic character. Even so, it remains a possibility that the passage in the book of Daniel has served as a source of inspiration to the overall procedure of word-based interpretation of dreams, particularly since the book of Daniel can otherwise be shown to have exerted some influence on the description of dreams in Old Icelandic literature. The

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[20] Jerome, *Commentariorum in Danielem Prophetam liber unus*, ed. by Migne, col. 521c.

book of Daniel, though, can at most have served as a source and a model. It does not explain why such a model should have been thought desirable in the first place, and certainly not why etymological interpretation of dreams should be more pronounced in Iceland than in Norway — or, for that matter, than in any other part of Europe. Such an impulse must be sought elsewhere.

The clearest example of the difference between Latin and Old Icelandic literature in the interpretation of dreams is to be found in the adaptation of a biblical dream to local narrative. The biblical passage in question is Genesis 41, where Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams. Pharaoh had a dream about seven beautiful and fat cows that came out of the Nile. Thereafter, seven ugly and lean cows emerged from the river and ate the beautiful cows. Pharaoh woke up but fell asleep again. He saw seven ears of corn on the same stalk, rank and good. After this, he saw seven other ears, thin and blasted, and the seven thin ears devoured the seven full ears. He then awoke.

When Joseph was called for to interpret the dreams, he said that they were the same dream. The seven fat cows and good ears of corn meant seven good years, whereas the seven lean cows and thin ears, devouring the others, meant that all resources from earlier years would be consumed during the seven lean years. Joseph therefore recommended that cereals be collected in the good years to be distributed during the lean years. This was done under the supervision of Joseph himself, and all ended well, at least to such an extent as concerns us here.

The Old Icelandic *Jómsvíkinga saga* was probably composed in its present form sometime in the thirteenth century.[21] In the beginning of the saga there is a passage that is clearly modelled on Genesis 41: King Gormr of Denmark asks for the hand of Þyri, daughter of the earl Klakk-Haraldr in Norway. She bids Gormr sleep for three nights in a particular house and report his dreams to her afterwards. He does so, and she agrees to marry him. Afterwards, at a feast, he relates his dreams in public and she interprets them: Three white oxen came up

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[21] The transmission history of *Jómsvíkinga saga* is complex, as it is found in four versions, one of which is a Latin translation of the late sixteenth century (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Om de norske kongers sagaer*, pp. 201–17; Megaard, 'Studier i *Jómsvíkinga saga*s stemma', p. 128. I here count four rather than five versions according to Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson's assessment of the closeness between the *Flateyarbók* and the AM 291 4to texts (*Om de norske kongers sagaer*, pp. 203)). Suffice it to say here that the relevant passage, including the etymological interpretation, is found in the three earliest manuscripts: AM 291 4to *c*. 1275–1300 ('*Jómsvíkinga saga*', ed. by Petersens, p. 5); Holm Perg 7 4to *c*. 1300–25 ('*Jómsvíkinga saga*', ed. by Cederschiöld, p. 3); *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fols) *c*. 1387–95 (*Flateyjarbók*, ed. by Guðbrandr Vigfusson and Unger, I, 101; dating according to *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog: Registre*, p. 308).

from the sea and then returned into it. Next came three red oxen, and finally three black, and they had the greatest horns of them all. Þyri interprets the oxen as lean years; white for snow, red for barrenness, and black for black (i.e. terrible) crop failure. Just as Moses persuaded Pharaoh to store crops from the good years, so Þyri and Gormr bring cereals and other foodstuffs from Norway to Denmark, so that the crop failure, in the end, is harmless.[22]

The story has undergone some local adaptation, such as that the Nile has been turned into the sea and, most conspicuously, that the two dreams have become an epic triad of nearly identical dreams. Despite such changes, there is so far little that is fundamentally unbiblical about the dreams and their interpretation. One detail, though, has been left out of the telling: When reporting his dreams, Gormr mentioned that the last set of oxen, the black ones, had by far the greatest horns ('miklu mest *hyrndir*').[23] Þyri explained: 'En þat, er þér þótti yxnin mjǫk vera *hyrndir*, þar munu margir menn verða þess *hornungar* er eigu' (But when you thought that these oxen had great horns, [this means that] many will be bereft of what they own).[24] At this point, visual interpretation is left behind in favour of wordplay. The word that makes the interpretation possible is *horn*, meaning either 'horn' or 'corner'. The word *horn* does not actually occur in this passage, but serves as an implicit bridge between the derivative adjective *hyrndr* (having horns) and *hornungr* (one shoved into the corner, bereft [of something]).[25]

This is where Joseph and Þyri part ways. Such etymological interpretation of dreams is foreign to the Bible but occurs widely in Old Icelandic literature. Sometimes it is used to enhance an interpretation arrived at through visual or other extralinguistic means, as in Þyri's interpretation. In other cases it overturns such an intuitive understanding, implying that, like in the strongly naturalist Isidorean tradition, phonetics can hold the crucial clues to the true nature of things.

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[22] *Fornmanna sögur*, xi, 4–8.

[23] *Fornmanna sögur*, xi, 6.

[24] *Fornmanna sögur*, xi, 7. My normalization.

[25] As a curiosity, it may deserve mention that just as there is no wordplay in the Vulgate Latin, so it disappears again when *Jómsvíkinga saga* is translated into Latin in the late sixteenth century. This version has it that 'cornua autem e vertice boum eminentia ditiores supercilia elaturos denotare videntur' (the horns protruding from the head of the oxen seem to signify that the wealthy will raise their eyebrows [at their loss of property, one would presume]) (*'Jómsvíkinga saga'*, ed. by Gjessing, p. 6). The interpretation is again purely visual or at least non-phonetic.

Wordplay Enhances Image

In this and the following section, the function of wordplay in dreams will be analysed through examples, in particular to clarify the quasi-etymological method, which always remains more or less implicit in the texts. In this first section I analyse examples where wordplay seems mainly to be used to enhance an interpretation that could probably have been arrived at through other symbolic procedures. Some passages seem to require little interpretation beyond that of images, and a reader could easily bypass these instances without notice. Here is a passage from *Íslendingabók*, a short chronicle of the history of Iceland composed in the first half of the twelfth century.[26] Þorsteinn surtr had a dream before presenting his reform of the calendar at the Icelandic National Assembly:

> Hann dreymði þat, at hann hugðisk vesa at lǫgbergi, þá es þat vas fjǫlmennt, ok vaka, en hann hugði alla menn aðra sofa. En síðan hugðisk hann sofna, en hann hugði þá alla aðra vakna. Þann draum réð Ósýfr Helgasonr, móðurfaðir Gellis Þorkelssonar, svá at allir menn myndi þǫgn varða, meðan hann mælti at lǫgbergi, en síðan es hann þagnaði, at þá myndi allir þat róma es hann hefði mælt. [...] En svá sem Ósýfr réð drauminn, þá vǫknuðu allir menn við þat vel.[27]

> [He dreamt that he had the impression of being on the Assembly Hill, surrounded by a large crowd, and that he was waking, but he thought that all the others were asleep. Afterwards he thought that he fell asleep, and he thought that all the others then woke up (*vakna*). That dream was interpreted by Ósýfr Helgasonr, maternal grandfather of Gellir Þorkelsson, in such a way that all men would keep quiet when he spoke at the Assembly Hill, but then, when he fell silent, they would all give their acclaim to what he had said. [...] And just as Ósýfr had interpreted the dream, they all gave their full consent *(vǫknuðu við þat vel)*.]

The expression *vakna við eitthvat* literally means 'awaken to something (a noise or state of affairs)' and, with a slight transfer of meaning, 'become aware of something'.[28] In the passage quoted above, however, the ordinary meaning is stretched to 'give one's consent', so that the correct interpretation of the dream is borne out by the words describing the event. The wording thus betrays that Ósýfr did not interpret the dream by visual or 'real life' symbolism alone, but also through linking the words.

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[26] The relevant wording of the passage may derive from a later date, as no contemporary manuscripts survive.

[27] *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson, pp. 10–11.

[28] Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske Sprog*, III, 842.

In *Íslendinga saga* (*c.* 1280),[29] Sturla Sighvatsson had a dream:

'Þat dreymði mik', segir Sturla, 'at ek þóttumzt hafa mjǫrsbjúga hlut í hendi, ok var av sniðit sneisarhaldit. Ek þóttumzt rétta ok slíta þar í sundr milli handa mér ok gefa yðr ǫllum at eta af með mér. En vita þóttumzt ek at sjá tíð var sem nú er'. 'Auðsær er draumr þinn', sagði Halldórr, 'þar mantu rétta hlut þinn. Kann ok vera at þú gefir oss nǫkkurn bergibita af áðr þessum fundi lúki'.[30]

['I dreamt', says Sturla, 'that I thought I had a piece (*hlut*) of sausage in my hand, and the end of it was shorn off. I thought I straightened it out and tore it apart with my hands and gave to all of you to eat with me. And I thought I knew that it was the time that it is now'. 'Your dream is easy to interpret', said Halldórr, 'you will right the wrongs committed against you (*rétta hlut þinn*). It may also be that you will give us some taste of it before this meeting is over'.]

This dream and its interpretation are largely visual, but the correct interpretation is dependent on arriving at the expression *rétta hlut sinn*, literally 'set one's lot aright', that is, 'right the wrongs committed against one'. *Hlutr* can mean both 'piece' and 'lot', and in this manner, the piece of sausage points to the *hlutr* part of the expression, whereas the curved shape of the sausage remains on the visual level and points to the other element in the expression — *rétta* (straighten). The correct interpretation is thus not merely extralinguistic and symbolic (from crooked to straight) but is contained within a fixed wording.

A more complex example is found in *Grænlendinga þáttr* (probably thirteenth century).[31] In the late summer in Greenland, sometime in the 1120s, a crew of fifteen under their captain Sigurðr are deliberating whether or not to press on in the hope of greater catch. Sigurðr suggests that they do, and the men agree to this. One of the crew members, Steinþórr, is uncomfortable with the decision and rises to speak:

'Dreymði mik í nótt, Sigurðr', sagði hann, 'ok mun ek segja þér drauminn. Nú, er vér fórum á fjǫrðinn þenna inn mikla, þóttumk ek kominn í milli bjarga nǫkkurra ok œpa til bjargar mér'. Sigurðr kvað drauminn meðallagi góðan, — 'ok skyldir þú þar eigi bjǫrg undir fótum troða ok hitta eigi í þann einangr, at þú mættir eigi munni halda'.[32]

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[29] Jakob Benediktsson, 'Sturlunga saga', p. 357.

[30] *'Sturlunga saga'*, ed. by Kålund, I, 432.

[31] *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, pp. xcii–xciii.

[32] *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, p. 277.

['Tonight I had a dream, Sigurðr', he said, 'and I will relate the dream to you. Now, when we sailed into this wide fjord, I thought I had ended up between some rocks (*bjarga*) and that I called out for help (*bjargar*)'. Sigurðr said that the dream was worthless — 'and you should not trample your hopes of rescue (*bjǫrg*) underfoot/ go walking about on mountains (*bjǫrg*) or end up in such a tight spot that you cannot keep your mouth shut'.]

As it turns out, Steinþórr was right. When they reach land, he recklessly enters a haunted house, comes out, and takes to screaming and running. He ends up in a crevice where no one can reach him and eventually perishes there.

Sigurðr had brushed the dream aside with an ambiguous expression that is also used in *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* (*troða bjǫrg undir fótum*; see below). *Troða undir fótum* is not listed in any dictionary but would not normally be used for walking on mountains; rather, it means something along the lines of 'trample'. This indicates that the real object is 'rescue' rather than 'mountains'. The wording thus hints that Sigurðr understood the implications of the phonetic connection between *bjarga* and *bjargar*, but that he had no intention of letting the fate of Steinþórr interfere with the hope of a great catch. When it was all over, Sigurðr dryly remarked that Steinþórr was 'too much of a true dreamer' (*of berdreyman*) and the matter is left at that. Wordplay as a marker for truth here underlines the subtle psychology of the story.

In *Flóamanna saga* (*c.* 1290–1375),[33] where many dreams are reported, father and son — Þorgils and Þorleifr — interpret each other's dreams:

'Enn dreymdi mik', segir Þorgils, 'at ek væra heima í Traðarholti. Ek sá á kné mínu inu hægra, þar váru vaxnir fimm hjálmlaukar saman, ok kvísluðust þar af margir laukar [...]'. Þorleifr svarar: 'Sé ek draum þinn. Þar muntu eiga fimm börn; frá þeim munu kvíslast margar ættir á Íslandi [...]'. Þorleifr mælti þá: 'Þat dreymdi mik, faðir, at mér þótti Þórný, systir mín, gefa mér osthleif, ok váru af bárurnar'. Þorgils mælti: 'Þar mun af it harðasta af kostum okkrum, er af váru bárurnar'.[34]

['I had another dream', says Þorgils, 'that I was at home in Traðarholt. I looked at my right knee, and there there were five helmet-leeks (?) growing close together, and many leeks sprouted from them [...]'. Þorleifr answers: 'I see your dream. You will have five children, and from them many families will sprout [...]'. Þorleifr then said: 'I dreamt, father, that I thought that Þórný, my sister, gave me a piece of cheese, and that the crusts were taken off'. Þorgils said: 'The hardest [part] of our sufferings will be over, if the crusts were taken off'.]

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[33] Flóamanna saga, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, p. clviii.

[34] Flóamanna saga, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, pp. 294–95.

Apart from the imagery of growth and hardness, there are several linguistic pointers in this passage.[35] The exact species of *hjálmlaukr* is not known, but *laukr* means leek, so we are obviously dealing with some sort of plant. These plants on Þorgils's knee (*kné*) thus point to the word *knérunnr*, literally 'knee-tree', meaning 'family line'.[36] Homonymy and synonymy are here combinded (*kné-*; *laukr/runnr*).

The root of the word *kvíslast* 'to sprout' is found also in words like *ættarkvísl* and *kynkvísl* (family branch; note the similar imagery in English), and Þorleifr can simply retain the wording in his interpretation: 'munu kvíslast margar ættir' (many families will sprout).

In the interpretation of the second dream, Þorgils makes use of the ambiguity in *kostir*, which can mean both 'supplies' and 'circumstances', that is, as they have now eaten the hard crusts of their provisions/endured the hardest circumstances, they can enjoy better fare/life. The connection between cheese and life is thus built on sense impressions (hard/soft) and phonetics alike. Furthermore, the expression *vera af* (lit. be off) can mean both 'be taken off/removed' and 'be over (of time, etc.)'.[37]

In the examples given above, etymological interpretation does not fundamentally alter the meaning of the dream. They show that such features were prized and belonged to the domain of the sagacious interpreter, but not that they were strictly necessary. In the cases to follow, though, the correct interpretation could probably not have been arrived at without recourse to etymological arguments, and such knowledge of the meaning of phonetics could be a matter of life and death.

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[35] These have been treated thoroughly by Perkins, 'The Dreams in *Flóamanna saga*', pp. 222–35.

[36] There may be an additional clue to the interpretation embedded in the word *hjálmlaukr* (helmet-leek), since the construction is reminiscent of conventional kennings like *sverðrunnr* (sword-tree), meaning 'warrior, man'. Such circumlocutions belonged to the basic poetic competence of Icelanders in the Middle Ages. The word may thus serve to indicate that the referent was human. Perkins, 'The Dreams in *Flóamanna saga*', pp. 226–27, suggests that *laukr* independently could have the secondary meaning 'excellent person'.

[37] The editors also think that the more common meaning of *bára*, 'wave' rather than 'crust' — i.e. the destructive force of waves — may be alluded to in this passage (Flóamanna saga, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, p. cliii). Henzen prefers an allusion to *barar* (stretcher, bier) (Henzen, *Über die Träume* in der Altnordischen Sagalitteratur, p. 48).

Wordplay Trumps Image

According to the kings' saga *Morkinskinna* (*c.* 1220),[38] the night before one of the many battles between King Haraldr harðráði of Norway and Sveinn Úlfsson of Denmark, Haraldr had a dream. The next day he told his men:

> 'Dreymði mik í nótt', segir hann, 'mér þótti sem vit Sveinn konungr fyndimsk ok heldim á einni hǫnk ok togaðim, ok dró hann af mér hǫnkina'. Þar rœddu menn misjafnt of draum konungs, ok réðu svá flestir at Sveinn konungr myndi þat hafa er þeir sviptusk um. 'Vera kann, herra', segir Hákon, 'at svá sé sem þeir ráða, en vænna þœtti mér at Sveini konungi myndi á hankask'.[39]

> ['Tonight I had a dream', he said; 'I thought that I and King Sveinn met and held on to a hank (*hǫnk*) and tugged on it, and that he pulled the hank from me'. The men had different interpretations of the king's dream, but most of them took it to mean that King Sveinn would gain what they were fighting about. 'It is possible, my lord', said Hákon, 'that it is as they say, but I find it more likely that Sveinn will lose the contest (*hankask á*)'.]

To pull on a hank (*toga á hǫnk*) seems to have been the Old Norse expression for a tug-of-war between two.[40] The expression *hankask á* occurs only here, but modern Icelandic has *hanka* (pull), and in light of this and modern Scandinavian cognates it is clear that the expression must mean something like 'to be pulled along; lose, have the worst of it'.[41] What matters for the present argument, though, is the use of this rare expression to interpret the dream. Hákon's attempt at an explanation may strike a modern reader as somewhat silly. Surely, the symbolic value must lie in the object, and not in what happens to be its name (*hǫnk*), as related to a vaguely similar word that has nothing at all to do with the content of the dream (*hankask á*). Until its retelling, the dream was not verbal, but rather a completely visual and physical experience. Nonetheless, as it turns out, Hákon's is the correct interpretation, and Sveinn's forces go down in crushing defeat.

Interestingly, the same motif is reported in *Flóamanna saga*, this time without paronomastic interpretation. Þorgils, the dreamer, reports:

[38] *Morkinskinna*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, I, p. xvii.

[39] *Morkinskinna*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, I, 243; *Morkinskinna*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, p. 207.

[40] Flóamanna saga, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, p. 293; Perkins, 'The Dreams in *Flóamanna saga*', pp. 213–15.

[41] Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon, *Íslensk orðsifjabók*, p. 305 s.v. *hanki*.

'Þótti mér sem vit Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson togaðim á eina hönk, ok missti hann'. Þorleifr svarar: 'Þar muntu enn koma til Íslands ok skipta málum við hann, ok mun þér þat betr ganga'.[42]

['I thought that I and Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson were pulling on a hank, and he lost it'. Þorleifr answers: 'You will return again to Iceland and come into conflict with him, and you will have the better of it'.]

This interpretation indicates how the motif would 'naturally' be interpreted, as is also shown by how most of the men interpret the dream in the *Morkinskinna* episode. The author of that episode, however, preferred to place the correct interpretation at a further remove and at a paronomastic level. His admiration for the prowess and cunning of Hákon Ívarsson is evident thoughout, and in this case he turns him into something of an etymologist, the only person present capable of uncovering the links from reality to words and back again.

A more explicit argument is given in *Vatnsdœla saga* (late thirteenth century).[43] One Þorkell the silfri (the silvery, i.e. rich) is planning on going to the local assembly to try to attain the position of judicial chieftain (*goði*) for the area of Vatnsdalr in northern Iceland:

Þorkel silfra dreymði ina næstu nótt áðr fundrinn var ok sagði Signýju, konu sinni, at hann þóttisk ríða ofan eptir Vatnsdal hesti rauðum, ok þótti honom trautt við jorðina koma — 'ok vil ek svá ráða, at rautt mun fyrir brenna ok til virðingar snúa'. Signý kvazk annan veg ætla, — 'sýnisk mér þetta illr draumr', — ok kvað hest mar heita, en marr er manns fylgja, ok kvað rauða sýnask, ef blóðug yrði, — 'ok má vera, at þú sér veginn á fundinum, ef þú ætlar þér goðorðit, því at nógir munu þér þess fyrirmuna'.[44]

[The night before the assembly Þorkell the silfri had a dream, and he told his wife Signý that he thought he came riding down Vatnsdalr on a red horse, and he seemed hardly to touch the ground — 'and I would interpret it thus: that good things await me [lit. 'that there is red fire ahead']][45] and that I will be awarded honour'. Signý said that she thought otherwise — 'I find this an evil dream' — and she said that a horse is called a *marr*, and that a *marr* is a man's companion spirit (*fylgja*), and she said that it would appear red if it became bloody — 'and it may be that you will be killed

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[42] *Flóamanna saga*, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, p. 293.

[43] *Vatnsdœla saga*, ed. by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, pp. li–lvi.

[44] *Vatnsdœla saga*, ed. by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, pp. 110–11.

[45] This idiom may allude to spotting a fire in the dark; in any event, it always means that one may hope for something good (see *Vatnsdœla saga*, ed. by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, p. 111).

at the assembly if you try to attain the position of judicial chieftain, since there are quite a few who will begrudge you that'.]

Again, the symbolism in Signý's interpretation is not primarily on the level of the object (the horse) or — as in Þorkell's interpretation — on colour, but on words that were not part of the dream itself. There are several possible ways to understand Signý's statement. The meaning of the second *marr* may be a masculine variant of the word *mara* (female spirit, riding men in their dreams (cf. night*mare*)), whether the word is inherited or simply invented by the author (this meaning of *marr* is not attested elsewhere). Alternatively, the alliterative phrase *marr er manns fylgja* may have been a traditional saying meaning 'the horse is man's companion',[46] in which case the author may have interpreted it based on double paronomasia, treating *marr* as an allusion to *mara* and understanding *fylgja* in its more common and specific meaning 'companion spirit', or according to simple homonymy, based only on the two meanings of *fylgja*. Either way, phonetics are the clue to the meaning of the dream. Phonetic similarities are not coincidental, and disregarding them is a risky business, as Þorkell is about to find out with an axe in his head.

In *Sverris saga* (*c.* 1200),[47] King Sverrir dreamt that he was led to where a man lay roasted on the fire (*steikðr á eldinum*). When invited to eat, Sverrir reluctantly began to do so, but then went on with increasing gusto until he came to the head. When told at that point to stop eating, he was as reluctant to do so as he had initially been to begin eating.

Sverrir chose to interpret his dream himself and concluded 'that the man lying on the fire (*er á eldinum lá*) was earl Erlingr, then beginning to grow old (*eldask*), and that King Magnús and his men were senile (*mjǫk eldir*) in counsel and feeble in resource'.[48]

The symbolism of eating one's enemy is straightforward enough, but the reason why Sverrir would be able to do so is not to be read out of the visual aspects

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[46] Thus *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, p. 111, probably basing the claim on the alliterative form of the expression (it could have made up a line in Old Norse poetry). It should be noted, though, that alliteration is common in Old Norse prose generally. If the Old Norse saying is accepted and the meaning 'horse' retained, the allusion to *mara* remains implicit.

[47] *Sverris saga*, ed. by Þorleifur Hauksson, p. xxiv.

[48] *Sverris saga*, trans. by Sephton, pp. 66–67, quoted in Lönnroth, 'Sverrir's Dreams', pp. 106–07.

of the dream. Rather, it is to be understood from the word for 'fire' — *eldr* — here connected to the verb for 'growing old': *eldask*.[49]

No passage in Old Norse literature contains as much etymological interpretation of dreams as when Þórhaddr recounts his twelve dreams to Steinn, who interprets them all, in *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* (mid-thirteenth century(?)).[50] Some of the more notable examples may suffice here:[51]

> 'Þat dreymði mik, at ek þóttumk hlaupa [...] upp at fjallinu [...] en ek þóttumk þar niðr koma, er heitir í *Hvarfi*'. Steinn svarar: 'Þat má vera, at þér ljái þess hugar at *hverfa* aptr'.[52]

> [[first dream] 'I dreamt that I went running [...] up the mountain, [...] and I seemed to come down in the place called *Hvarf*. Steinn answers: 'It may be that you will be in a mind to turn back (*hverfa aptr*)'.]

Here, the place-name Hvarf serves as a pointer to the expression *hverfa aptr* (to return, turn back).

> 'ek sá tungl tvau, ok fór annat at venju, en annat var í fjalli at húsbaki, ok þóttumk ek taka þat ok eta'. Steinn mælti: '[...] þar hefir þú etit heimsundr, ok merkir þat glœpyrði þín'.[53]

> [[second dream] 'I saw two moons, and one of them travelled as usual, but the other one was in the mountain behind the house, and I thought I took it and ate it'. Steinn said: '[...] there you ate a portent (*heimsundr*), and that signifies your rash words (*glœpyrði*)'.]

The connection between eating and rash words is, presumably, the mouth. The function of the moon in this context is, however, less straightforward and seems to lie on the paronomastic level. The moon which Þórhaddr eats is not the ordinary one, but the strange moon in the mountain. Such a moon can be nothing other than a portent, a *heimsundr*. This word, in turn, points to such words as *heimska* (stupidity) and *heimskr* (stupid) — stupidity being a recurrent theme in the sagas. The *glœpyrði* (rash words), in turn, are not only stupid

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[49] The connection between the two words may go beyond phonetic similarity, as both fire and age are destructive forces.

[50] *Austfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, pp. cviii–cix.

[51] *Austfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, pp. 309–13.

[52] *Austfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, p. 309.

[53] *Austfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, p. 310.

in themselves, but share root with *glópr* (stupid man). It is thus the word for the category of phenomena to which the portentious moon belongs that points to the right interpretation. There may be an additional allusion to *tunga* (tongue) in the word *tungl* (moon), though *tungl* is disregarded in the interpretation in favour of *heimsundr*.[54]

> 'ek þóttumk ganga til sjávar, þar sem var saltsviða mikil [...] ok þóttumk ek eta glóanda salt ok drekka sjáinn við'. Steinn mælti: 'Þat merkir svívirðilig orð þín'.[55]

> [[fifth dream] 'I thought I went to the sea, where there was a great brine-boiling facility for salt (*saltsviða*) [...] and I thought I ate glowing salt and drank from the sea'. Steinn said: 'That denotes your shameful (*svívirðilig*) words'.]

The phonetic pointer in this case seems to lie in *svi-/sví-*, whereas the moral implications of the shameful words are underlined by torments of heat and thirst.

> '[...] ok stóðum vér þá allir saman á bjarginu'. Steinn mælti: '[...] en þar sem þér stóðuð á bjargi, þar munu þér alla yðra bjǫrg undir fótum troða'. [...] Þórhaddr mælti: 'Þenna draum ætla ek góðan'. Steinn kvað svá ganga mundu sem hann sagði.[56]

> [[sixth dream] '[...] and we all stood together on the mountain'. Steinn said: '[...] and where you stood on a mountain (*bjargi*), there you trample all your hope of rescue (*bjǫrg*) underfoot'. [...] Þórhaddr said: 'I think this is a good dream'. Steinn replied that it would turn out the way he said.]

Here, the expression *troða bjǫrg undir fótum* which we also saw in *Grænlendinga þáttr* is again used to establish a connection between *bjarg* (mountain) and *bjǫrg* (rescue), but this time its meaning is unequivocally negative. Þórhaddr has just described how he and his sons got up onto a mountain (*bjarg* (n.)). The correct interpretation of the dream is that they will trample all their hope of rescue (*bjǫrg* (f.)) underfoot. Þórhaddr protests, presumably because he cannot see how ascending a mountain with his sons can be a bad thing. Steinn, however, knows the power of paronomasia and so, in the end, will Þórhaddr.[57]

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[54] Henzen, *Über die Träume* in der Altnordischen Sagalitteratur, p. 48, notes the words *tungl* and *tunga*, but not *heimsundr*.

[55] *Austfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, pp. 310–11.

[56] *Austfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, p. 311.

[57] The killing of Þórhaddr's sons is described in the saga, but that of Þórhaddr himself is lost in a lacuna and known only from other sources (*Austfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, pp. 318–19).

'[...] ok þótti mér sem kastat væri í fyrirskyrtu mér járnum þeim, sem rœr heita [...]'. Steinn mælti: 'Þess get ek til, at sættarfundr muni vera lagðr með ykkr Þorsteini'.[58]

[[tenth dream] '[...] and I thought that people threw in my lap the kind of iron implements that are called clinch plates (*rœr*) [...]'. Steinn said: 'My guess is that you and Þorsteinn will meet to be reconciled'.]

Here, the name of the iron implements is the pointer. *Ró* (pl. *rœr*) is a clinch plate, but also means 'peace'. The use of clinch plates to connect the planks of a ship may carry some symbolic force here, since the clinch plate creates, so to speak, a harmonious bond between two things that would otherwise fall apart, but the main clue to the meaning of the dream lies in the name itself. To add to the interpretive complexity, the plural form *rœr* veils the connection to *ró* (peace), so that only the wisest of interpreters (or readers) can uncover the true message.

'ek þóttumk fara ór Breiðdal Hjarðarskarð ok til bœjar þess, er í Þroti heitir [...]'. Steinn svarar: 'Ekki kemr mér þat á óvart, at þu farir Hjarðarskarð [...] ok þrotnir þar'.[59]

[[twelfth dream] 'I thought that I travelled along Hjarðarskarð out of Breiðdalr and to the farm called Þrot [...]'. Steinn answers: 'It does not surprise me that you would travel Hjarðarskarð [decimation of the flokk] [...] and come to an end (*þrotnir*) there'.]

The whereabouts of Hjarðarskarð and Þrot are unknown, and they have probably never existed.[60] Rather, these names have been introduced into the Icelandic landscape for the dream to be interpreted.[61]

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[58] *Austfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, p. 312.

[59] *Austfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, p. 313.

[60] *Austfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, p. 313.

[61] Examples of etymological interpretation of dreams that have been left out of this overview: (1) In *Guðmundar saga*, Ingimundr dreamt that he came to the archbishop (*erkibiskyp*). Guðmundr interprets this to mean that he will experience a great wonder (*erkibýsn*; the wonder, unfortunately, consists in that his beloved foster-father breaks his leg and that Ingimundr loses all his books) (*Biskupa sögur*, I, 423). (2) In *Sturlunga saga*, Svarthǫfði dreamt 'at Vigfúss Gunnsteinsson væri horfinn ór liði þeira, ok reðu sva sumir menn, at lítil mundi verða þessi ferð um víga-ferlin' (that Vigfúss Gunnsteinsson had disappeared from their band, and some interpreted it to mean that this expedition would be insignificant with regard to warfare). Víg-fúss means 'eager for battle' (*'Sturlunga saga'*, ed. by Kålund, II, 222). (3) A special case of interpretation of names within a dream is the dialogue between Jóreiðr and Guðrún Gjúkadóttir in *Sturlunga saga*: '"Hvernig er þér til Hrafns?" segir hon. "Leiðir eru mér allir svartir fuglar", segir draumkonan. "Hvernig er þér til Þorgils skarða?" segir mœrin. "Illir þykki mér allir þeir fugla

Function and Background

Unlike stock motif dreams, such as dreams about animals representing enemies or of ancestors foretelling the future, etymological interpretation presents the interpreter as one who understands things that are hidden to others.[62] Since the etymological argument is generally only implied, without etymological formulas or the like, it also engages the reader intellectually. Such linguistic guesswork seems to have been a desirable feature in Icelandic sagas, as attested by the countless stanzas of skaldic poetry quoted in their narratives. The instance of *ofljóst* given in the beginning of this chapter belongs to the more inaccessible parts of skaldic diction, but it may serve as an example of just how much interpretive effort these authors expected of their readers.

As we have seen, etymological interpretation of dreams seems not to be derived from the Latin tradition, but it remains possible that the use of etymological arguments in general have been imported from Latin sources. If so, this mode of dream interpretation cannot have become unique to Icelandic literature because it was taken over outright from oral tradition, but some other explanation must rather be sought. I turn now to the question of whether there may have existed some kind of local etymological tradition for Icelandic authors to draw on.

The context of etymological arguments not related to dreams in Old Icelandic literature may offer some clues to their background. Snorri's *æsir–Ásía* etymology, mentioned at the outset of this chapter, is connected to the Latinizing or pseudo-learned context of descent from Troy. This etymology can thus hardly belong to a pristine, Old Norse-Icelandic tradition.[63]

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er í sitt hreiðr skíta"' ('How do you like Hrafn (raven)?' she says. 'I dislike all black birds', says the dream woman. 'How do you like Þorgils skarði (*skarð* = crevice, rift, ravine)?' says the girl. 'I think all birds are bad who foul in their own nests'). The crevice, then, is obviously the one between Þorgils's buttocks (*'Sturlunga saga'*, ed. by Kålund, II, 244). Two further examples are without interpretation but are borne out by events: (4) In the Legendary Saga of Óláfr, King Knútr's men offer Bjǫrn (bear) the marshal money for the head of King Óláfr. Bjǫrn hangs them all and brings the money to Óláfr. Just before he enters the hall, Óláfr recounts his dream: '"Mér sýndisk", kvað hann, "bjarndýr eitt mikit, ok var glatt ok lék við mik blíðrlega ok fœrði mér hǫfuð sitt"' ('I saw', he said, 'a great bear (*bjarndýr*, cf. Bjǫrn), and it was happy and played with me gently and offered me its head') (*'Olafs saga hins helga'*, ed. by Johnsen, p. 72). (5) In Gunnarr's dream in *Njáls saga*, a flock of wolves kills a hart (*hjǫrtr*), i.e. Gunnarr's friend Hjǫrtr (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, p. 156).

[62] On stock motif dreams, see Lönnroth, 'Dreams in the Sagas', pp. 456–57.

[63] It is noteworthy that there is no *quia*-formula or other such features of etymological

Apart from dreams, arguments — albeit implicit — based on wordplay are not very common in Old Icelandic literature, with the important exception of Snorri's *Edda*.[64] The *Edda* is a work on skaldic diction and metre, and it seems to have been a guiding principle of Snorri's to explain as much as possible of poetic diction in terms of concrete references to mythological beings, objects, and narratives.[65] To this end, Snorri often relies on creative readings of earlier poetry.[66] One of Snorri's most daring interpretations is that of a stanza describing how the proto-giant Ymir was laid in his coffin (*lúðr*). The meaning 'coffin' can be stretched to mean 'box', in which case the word is synonymous to *ǫrk*, which means not only 'box', but also the Ark of Noah.[67] From Snorri's commentary on the stanza, it is clear that he used the assets of homonymy and synonymy to extract a pre-Christian version of the Flood from a poem that describes nothing of the sort. This he probably did to add a prefigurative dimension to the story. In these and other instances, Snorri either created or used pre-existing homonymy, and his method seems to be influenced by etymology. The background to this influence may perhaps be sought in the encyclopaedic tradition, which has affected the *Edda* in other regards as well.[68]

discourse in it. The paronyms *æsir–Ásía* thus bear comparison to etymological dreams; they were both objects of etymological inquiry lacking etymological markers. On the fluid border between etymology and other uses of wordplay, see the introduction to this volume.

[64] This is not to say that paronomasia with functions beyond phonetic ornament is rare, but that it is seldom used to support an interpretation, a point of view, or a version of a story. Examples of, for instance, proper names that carry contextually significant meaning abound, such as the berserk Ljótr (ugly) in *Egils saga*.

[65] Roberta Frank speaks of 'the euhemeristic determination of Snorri and his predecessors to uncover meaning in *fornar kenningar*' ('Snorri and the Mead of Poetry', p. 158), and Margaret Clunies Ross calls this 'the animate principle' (she relates the principle to Snorri's perception of the animate beliefs of pre-Christian man, though I suspect that we may rather, or at least also, be dealing with a 'concrete principle', based on the generally concretizing character of medieval encyclopaedias) ('*Skáldskaparmál*', pp. 16, 30–31, 105, 115).

[66] Thus, for instance, he interprets *óðrærir* (mind-stirrer (poetry)) as the name of a vat containing the mead of poetry (a central image in skaldic poetry), and *Gillings gjǫld* (Gillingr's (a giant's) draughts (mead of poetry)) as 'payment for Gillingr', which prompts him to tell the story about that incident (see Frank, 'Snorri and the Mead of Poetry', pp. 161–62, 164–65). *Gjald* (pl. *gjǫld*) would by Snorri's time only have meant 'payment' (not 'drink'). Some of the individual cases of creative reading that Frank discusses may be open to debate, but her general argument remains convincing.

[67] Holtsmark, 'Det norrøne ord *lúðr*'.

[68] On influence from the encyclopaedic tradition (though without reference to etymology), see Clunies Ross, '*Skáldskaparmál*', pp. 151–73.

Another aspect of etymological reasoning that surfaces from time to time in Icelandic literature is that of explaining the original meaning of a name. In hagiographic literature, Latin explanations may be taken over outright, such as the initial letter etymology of Mary's name as *Mater Alma Regis Iesu Angelorum*, which is then translated as *móðir heilug Iesu engla konungs* (holy mother of Jesus, king of angels).[69] Most examples, however, are found outside of an obviously learned context and can therefore not be assigned to either a Latinizing or a homegrown tradition on those grounds. There are, however, other indications that point to a late date, and thus, presumably, a learned setting. Consider Qlvir *barnakarl* (children's man), an Icelandic settler of the ninth century: There is no reason to assume that his cognomen meant anything other than 'one who has many children', as in the case of another settler, Barna-Kjallakr, who is described as having many sons,[70] and like *barnamaður* in Modern Icelandic.[71] Medieval chroniclers, however, knew that Qlvir had spent time as a Viking in the British Isles and were not satisfied with his prosaic fertility; rather, they explain, he got his name because he would not impale children on spear points, as other Vikings were wont to do.[72] Whoever came up with this explanation had a no less exotic perception of the Viking Age than many do today.

In *Eyrbyggja saga*, a certain Hrólfr lived in the island of Moster, off the coast of Norway. Because of his great love of Þórr, he was called Þórólfr (<Þór-Hrólfr).[73] Quite apart from the exotic flavour of this explanation, no one named Hrólfr is likely ever to have had his name changed to Þórólfr, since that name has developed out of Þór-ulfr (Þórr-wolf).[74]

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[69] *Mariu saga*, ed. by Unger, p. 7. The name of Adam is explained by initial letter etymology in the Old Norse *Elucidarius* ('*Elucidarius' in Old Norse Translation*, ed. by Firchow and Grimstad, p. 43). On initial letter etymology, see my 'Etymology, Wordplay, and the Truth Value of the Linguistic Sign from Antiquity to the Middle Ages'.

[70] *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, p. 15.

[71] Halldór Hermannsson, 'Viðurnefnið "barnakarl"', p. 3; *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmenta*, pp. 286–87.

[72] *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson, p. 379. This motif turns up, again of the Vikings, in Henry of Huntingdon, and of the pagan Irish in the Life of Cainnech. It thus seems to have been a motif for illustrating the cruelty of pagans (Halldór Hermannsson, 'Viðurnefnið "barnakarl"'; though note that the practice is there considered authentic and that Halldórr Hermansson claims that it has been wrongly attributed to the Irish).

[73] *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, p. 6.

[74] Kruken and Stemshaug, *Norsk personnamnleksikon*, p. 567 s.v. Torolv. Hrólfr is itself a compound name, derived from *Hróð-ulfr (glory-wolf) (p. 480 s.v. Rolv). This, however, is not likely to have been known in the Middle Ages.

Examples like these indicate that etymological arguments were a tool for recreating the past, rather than a remnant thereof. They belong to the sphere of learned speculation, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that they were not in any conspicuous way part of preliterate Old Norse-Icelandic culture, but were rather introduced with Latin learning. This is perhaps not very surprising, since it is not a given that medieval etymology — heir to centuries of Stoic speculation and Christian exegesis — should have a native counterpart. Thus, for instance, one noteworthy feature in the etymological tradition which is not likely to be universal or 'natural' is that wordplay can often win out against more intuitive or contextually accentuated forms of symbolism. This is true also of most Old Icelandic examples discussed in this chapter.

Why, then, is the use of etymological interpretation nowhere as prominent in Old Icelandic secular literature as in the interpretation of dreams? The general character of that literature may hold some clues. Although writing in Old Norse developed out of Latin literacy and was heavily influenced by this background, it still retained many distinctive features. One of these is the relative lack of authorial commentary, harking back, one may presume, to local modes of storytelling. In particular, allegorical interpretation in any explicit form is all but unheard of outside of the grammatical, philosophical, and theological discourses. The one noteworthy exception is, precisely, dreams, which tend to be allegorical in some sense, unless a dream person shows up to give orders or narrate future events. Dreams were a favourite narrative tool, partly, perhaps, because they provided the opportunity of adding commentary and pointers without breaking the stylistic code of repressing the narrator's voice. The hundreds of dreams reported in Old Icelandic literature may thus be more indebted to narrative technique than to a general obsession with dreams.

The fact that dreams — apart from poetry — are the prime object of explicit interpretation in Old Icelandic narrative in one sense explains why dreams are a locus of etymological arguments; because of the repressed narrator's voice, they had nowhere else to go. This does not, however, explain why such interpretation should be used at all. If the Latin tradition does not feature etymological interpretation of dreams, and if the preliterate Old Norse-Icelandic tradition did not make any prominent use of etymology at all, we seem to have run out of possible sources for this practice. At this point, the final place to look for clues is in the sagas themselves. Within that corpus, the function of dreams bears comparison to that of another recurrent element, namely skaldic stanzas. The treatment of this kind of poetry may provide an instructive parallel to the interpretation of dreams.

Skaldic poetry was a prestigious and traditional form of poetry that remained relatively stable from *c*. 900 to *c*. 1400. Two features are prominent

and may even serve to define skaldic poetry from its beginnings to its demise: its ubiquitous kennings and its internal rhymes. Semantic transfers and phonetic similarities are thus at the heart of this poetry.

In their literary realization, etymological dreams have their closest, non-dream-related counterpart in skaldic stanzas in the sagas where unconventional wordplay (i.e. not ordinary kennings, but rather *ofljóst* or similar devices) is used, and where this is somehow signalled in the prose. Thus, for instance, in *Gísla saga* we hear that 'Gísli kvað þá vísu, er æva skyldi' (Gísli then proclaimed a stanza that he never should have), after which Gísli in poetic form confesses to be the killer of 'fálu vinar tál-grímr' (the troll-woman's friend's [giant's] deceit-[Þór-] *-grímr* [Þorgrímr]).[75] This hidden reference would eventually come to prove Gísli's undoing.

At one point in *Egils saga*, Egill disguises the name Ásgerðr in a stanza as *berg-Óneris*[76] *foldar faldr* (berg-Ónerir's [giant's] land's [mountain's, here 'ridge', ON *áss*] shawl [ON *faldr*, synonym *gerða*]: *ás-gerða* > Ásgerðr).[77] The reading of this kenning is not entirely secure, but it is clear that the words signify the name Ásgerðr, and it seems that both homonymic and synonymic strategies are used. The addressee of the stanza, Arinbjǫrn, 'spurði, hver kona sú væri, er hann orti mansǫng um — "hefir þú fólgit nafn hennar í vísu þessi"' (asked who the woman was about whom he composed a love poem — 'you have hidden her name in this stanza'). Egill produced another stanza which brought Arinbjǫrn no closer to the answer and then simply told him that the woman in question was Ásgerðr. The reader, of course, knew this all along and is encouraged to try to somehow extract the name from the poetry.

In cases like these in particular, but with skaldic poetry embedded in prose generally, the reader must stop to ponder obscure words and phrases. The modern propensity to simply skip such difficult poetry seems not to have been shared by saga authors or, presumably, by their readers; the amount of poetry embedded in saga prose is massive, and its content is often topicalized in the prose, as in the examples above. Like dreams, the stanzas demand interpretation and, again like dreams, they are often the locus of such sparse authorial commentary as may be found in the sagas. Dreams and stanzas thus exhibit a considerable functional overlap and one, furthermore, which is on the whole

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[75] *Vestfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, p. 58; Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, BI, 97; AI, 102.

[76] A variant, though in all likelihood secondary, reading is *Bergǫnundar*, which seems to be derived from the prose, but must probably also be understood as 'giant' in the stanza.

[77] *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal, pp. 148–49.

not shared with other building blocks in the sagas. Much of the interpretive process of skaldic poetry is intralinguistic, relating to synonyms and paronomasia (though knowledge of kenning structures and myth is also needed to decode the kennings), and in this regard it is similar to etymological dreams. Skaldic poetry enjoyed enormous prestige and importance in Iceland, where all relevant sagas originate, and the development of skaldic prosimetrum is to a large extent synonymous with the development of saga style. Whatever the oral antecedents of the prosimetrical saga, its literary realization must have been the product of much experimentation with and awareness of form. This is borne out most clearly by the occasional composition of new 'old' poetry to put in the mouth of saga heroes, showing that the process was far from one of passive recording; the prosimetrical form was a stylistic ideal under development and one that entailed considerable creative efforts.[78]

With these observations in mind, it seems likely that intralinguistic interpretation of skaldic poetry and dreams are somehow connected — albeit the actual mode of interpretation of dreams is more in line with the etymological than with the skaldic tradition. This impression is bolstered by the fact that etymological interpretation of dreams occurs almost exclusively in the types of literature where skaldic poetry interacts closely with the narrative, namely in sagas of Icelanders and kings' sagas. Skaldic poetry and etymological interpretation of dreams are both largely absent from the fantastic sagas of the pre-settlement time, the *fornaldarsögur*. These sagas are rich in poetry, but it is almost exclusively of the accessible, eddic type. It raises the discourse to a poetic and archaic level, but it does not require the reader to engage in the unravelling of a complex web of secondary signification. The correspondence between the level of accessibility of dreams and poetry indicates that they were in some respects seen as related phenomena (albeit 'simple' dreams abound in skaldic prosimetra as well — there was no genre of dreams demanding wordplay in the way that skaldic poetry demands kennings).[79] This connection may also explain the absence of etymological interpretation of dreams in Norwegian literature.

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[78] Such poetry can be identified with relative certainty in *Egils saga*, *Kormáks saga*, *Njáls saga*, *Grettis saga*, *Víglundar saga*, *Stjörnu-Odda draumr*, *Ragnars saga* (for a brief overview, see Males, 'Applied *Grammatica*', pp. 291–94). It is not certain how widespread that practice was, since dating skaldic poetry on formal grounds is generally difficult, and content is an even more uncertain guide.

[79] This demand holds true until the composition of the poem *Lilja* in the middle of the fourteenth century and, outside of religious poetry, also after that time (see Foote, 'Latin Rhetoric and Icelandic Poetry', pp. 265–66 and n. 42).

Vernacular grammatical literature in general and grammatical interest in skaldic poetry in particular was on the whole an Icelandic, but not a Norwegian, preoccupation in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries.[80] Etymological interpretation of dreams shows the same geographical distribution. These observations are probably valid for etymological types of wordplay (i.e. including explicit observations on homonymy, etc.) also outside of dreams, such as the play on the double meaning of the negation/adverb *at* in *Víga-Glúms saga* or the stunningly complex account of a murder in *Króka-Refs saga*.[81] Another way of putting this is that prosimetrical saga literature at large developed in Iceland, whereas Norwegian texts on the whole remained more closely connected to Continental traditions and were written in prose only.[82] There was thus no room for the functions of poetry to spill over into surrounding prose. Etymologies may indeed be found in Norwegian texts, such as, for instance, the Book of Homilies and *Hirðskrá*, but they are of a character that is readily recognizable from a Latin perspective.

Etymological interpretation of dreams is a telling example of the creativity that was unleashed when the strong Old Norse-Icelandic poetic tradition met with Latin learning, particularly in Iceland. Latin models were often not imported wholesale into Old Icelandic literature, but were rather replaced with native counterparts that were partly transformed in the process. Time and time again, this replacement is linked to the strong poetic tradition of Iceland. This is true of mythology, of metrics, of grammatical treatises, of the formation of a poetic canon to match the *poetae*, and of hagiography in the form of traditional praise-poetry.[83] In the case of etymological dreams, the two traditions merged

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[80] This is not to say that there was no interest in skaldic poetry in Norway, but unlike in Iceland, it does not seem that grammatical studies and an entire literature had formed around it. (A few runic inscriptions containing skaldic poetry have been found in Norway, and Norwegian kings and noblemen were repeatedly the object of Icelandic praise poetry.)

[81] *Eyfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, pp. 86–87; *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. by Jóhannes Halldórsson, pp. 153–55. One example of how the confession of the murder in *Króka-Refs saga* is rendered incomprehensible to any but the wise king may suffice here: Króka-Refr says that his opponent *marghrossaði við* (many-horsed). The king explains that the word for a group of many horses is *stóð*, and that the meaning is that the opponent *nam staðar* (stopped). Interestingly, this and another example in the same passage (*lynghnappr > byrðr > borit*) shows that the etymological principle of approximate phonetic correspondence could be adapted to accommodate the ablaut system, which is much more pervasive in Germanic languages than in Latin.

[82] The most obvious, albeit embryonic, exception is *Ágrip* (*c.* 1190), with its six couplets, half stanzas or stanzas.

[83] Classical mythology was completely replaced by Old Norse mythology in grammati-

to create something that was new, insofar as it had not existed before, but also old, in the sense that it built on functions that were normally attributed to skaldic poetry, and thus to the most tradition-bound and prestigious part of Old Icelandic secular literature. Etymological interpretation of dreams has hardly contributed to the high regard in which Old Icelandic literature is generally held, nor is it likely to do so. In its own way, though, it can help explain how Old Icelandic literature can seem so familiar and yet so different from most European literatures of the Middle Ages: In many instances, the development of Old Icelandic literature was not so much a process of imitation of Latin literature as one of replacement, and the strong poetic tradition in Iceland probably carries much of the responsibility for this outcome.[84]

cal literature; a metre such as *hrynhenda*, in all likelihood inspired by Latin hymns, retained traditional Old Norse alliteration and internal rhyme; the most widely used grammatical treatise, Snorri's *Edda*, was completely adapted to serve the needs of skaldic poetry; the Third Grammatical Treatise replaces all classical poetry in Donatus's *Barbarismus* with native counterparts; in the twelfth century, *Vita sancti Eustacii* was translated into prose, but also into the traditionalizing poem *Plácitúsdrápa* (much other religious poetry also took on this traditional form).

[84] This may be seen as a less explicit and possibly less self-conscious variant of the 'building up of a native literary tradition through aggressive textual appropriation' that Rita Copeland has termed *secondary translation* and exemplified with works by Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower (*Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages*, pp. 184–85).

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Language as Artefact:
The Practice of *Etymologia* in the Narratives about the Origin of the Slavs

Julia Verkholantsev

Etymologia and Etymology

'All Slavic languages derive from one forefather, Slav, who also lent his name to all Slavic peoples, as is shown by their present names, such as Tomislav, Stanislav, Janislav, and Ventseslav', explains the author of the late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*.[1] A linguistic approach to the origins of peoples and their habitats is not unusual in the Latinate medieval historiography,[2] in which the names of nations and their legendary rulers are associated with the circumstances of their foundations and historical mission. Modern scholars do not take such deductive arguments seriously: historians — often with a generous dose of scholarly scepticism — view them as mythical narratives and learned inventions, linguists discard them as popular, false, and

[1] 'Que tamen ab uno patre Slawo unde et Slaus originem habuerunt qui et hucusque isto nomine uti non obmittuntur, videlicet Thomislaus, Stanislaus, Janislaus, Venceslaus etc.' (*Chronica Ploniae Maioris*, ed. by Kürbis, p. 5).

[2] I use the term 'Latinate' as a more inclusive way to indicate traditions both in Latin and in vernacular languages, influenced by Latin literacy and learning.

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pseudo-etymologies, while scholars of literature, following the classical tradition, study them as a part of poetic rhetoric, seeing in them allegories, 'ornaments of style', and mnemonic devices.[3]

One cannot fully appreciate medieval historiographic methods without engaging with medieval theories of grammar and rhetoric. These demonstrate that *etymologia*, a heuristic and interpretive tool with its specific repertoire of principles and reasoning, was recognized by the learned as the foundation of all written words.[4] It is thus not surprising that the authors, who understood their task of writing *historia* in the way suggested by the Greek term (meaning 'inquiry, research'), resort to language as a storage resource of human memory that has preserved the past.

The idea of the non-arbitrariness of names, however, is not a medieval invention and is already debated in classical thought: no discussion of etymologizing can pass without a mention of Plato's *Cratylus*. In his dialogue, Plato makes Socrates choose between Hermogenes's linguistic conventionalism and Cratylus's naturalism — that is, whether names signify by arbitrary and intentional conventions, or whether their meanings are naturally embedded in letters and sounds.[5] Although Socrates refutes both methods and proposes, rather than investigating names, to investigate the things themselves, his argument does not lessen the fascination with language as a source of etiological, mythographic, and theological discourses in all times to come, from ancient to modern.[6]

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[3] See, for example, Ó Muraíle, 'Dinnshenchas'; Dini, *Prelude to Baltic Linguistic*, p. 49. On the literary and allegorical study of etymology, see Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*, pp. 138–84; Culler, 'The Call of the Phoneme'; Taylor, 'Some Uses of Etymology in the Reading of Medieval Germanic Texts'; Reynolds, *Medieval Reading*, pp. 80–87; O'Hara. *True Names*, pp. 102–11; Del Bello, *Forgotten Paths*; Carruthers, 'Inventional Mnemonics and the Ornaments of Style'. On the poetic and allegorical use of etymology in classical tradition, see Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, *Ancient Poetic Etymology*; Nifadopoulos, *Etymologia*; Peraki-Kyriakidou, 'Aspects of Ancient Etymologizing'; and, most recently, Herren, 'The Growth of Allegory', in *The Anatomy of Myth*, pp. 109–22.

[4] Here and hereafter in this study, I wish to make a clear distinction between the premodern idea and practice of *etymologia* and contemporary scholarly principles and uses of the linguistic field of etymology. For a succinct account and collection of primary sources, see *Medieval Grammar & Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, pp. 339–66. For a more detailed history of the development of etymological method in late antique and early medieval grammatical thought, see Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters*; Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*; Opelt, 'Etymologie'.

[5] Literature on this question is voluminous. See for example, Sedley, *Plato's 'Cratylus'*, ch. 2: 'Plato the Etymologist', pp. 25–50; Baxter, *The Cratylus*.

[6] For a quick overview and bibliography, see Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, 'Gradations of Science'.

The naturalist perspective on language is further developed in the thought of the Stoic philosophers who believed that the language of the first humans contained original meanings that have been obscured by linguistic derivation. From what imperfect knowledge we possess about their linguistic ideas, we can conclude that Stoics believed that the primitive wisdom of the first *homo loquens* was superior to that of their own time and could be recovered through the use of *etymologia*. This practice called for the analysis of semantic and phonetic similarities between the names in the living languages, 'names' being broadly understood (adjectives and verbs, as well as common and proper names were also thrown in this category). It is even possible that the term *etymologia* itself was coined by one of the Stoics, Chrysippus (*c*. 280–207 BC).[7] The recognition of the ambiguity of language and belief in linguistic naturalism are key philosophical premises of Stoic etymologizing: Chrysippus seems to think that since language is ambiguous by nature, words convey more than one meaning, which the speaker may not be able to control. The signifier's polysemantic quality thus determines the capacity of a name to open up to multiple interpretations.[8]

Stoic philosophical principles of *etymologia* are developed in the formal grammatical discourse by Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BC). In *De lingua latina*, Varro formalizes the method of exegetical *etymologia* by introducing the concept of natural (i.e. systematic) and voluntary (i.e. unsystematic) morphological derivation. While natural derivation (*declinatio naturalis*) accounts for regular paradigmatic relationships between grammatical forms of the same lexemes, the second kind (*declinatio voluntaria*) is an arbitrary and unsystematic process of word derivation. If over time speakers create new words in arbitrary ways, according to their will (*voluntas*), then etymologists are justified in using extra-systemic criteria in order to retrace the arbitrary derivational history. They have to explore similarly arbitrary phonological and semantic connections between the names that they interpret, and therefore they subtract, add, or transpose letters/sounds.[9]

Even though the Stoic and Varronian manner of etymologizing was criticized by some grammarians and philosophers and taken cautiously by others,

[7] Allen, 'The Stoics on the Origin of Language and the Foundations of Etymology'; Colish, *The Stoic Tradition*, pp. 56–60; Long, 'Stoic Linguistics, Plato's *Cratylus*, and Augustine's *De Dialectica*'.

[8] Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, pp. 131–39. See also Domaradzki, 'Theological Etymologizing in the Early Stoa'.

[9] Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, pp. 24–29; Taylor, *Declinatio*, pp. 23–28, 65–73.

the medieval linguistic mindset, semiotic in its very nature, favoured the understanding of language as the archive of natural signs. In fact, we know about Stoic etymologizing largely from late antique and early medieval authors themselves. Although Augustine (354–430) disapproves the use of etymology in *De dialectica* (due to its association with secular thought), he himself resorts to etymologizing on more than one occasion, adapting this practice to Christian discourse.[10] Jerome puts the Logos-oriented grammar of Augustine firmly into practice and biblical scholarship. His exegetical approach that involves all three sacred languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, is fundamentally etymological and is concerned with establishing both technical and spiritual origins of the language of scripture.[11]

The relationship between human history and language, conveyed in the biblical story of the creation of seventy-two tongues at the Tower of Babel, becomes the focal point of the greatest etymologist of Latin medieval scholarship, Isidore of Seville (*c.* 560–636).[12] In *Etymologiae sive origines*, Isidore brings together and explicates the best of classical and late antique learning, making his work one of the most widely read and cited authoritative vade mecums of the Middle Ages. But his compendium was not just a popular read; it influenced the very way that scholars and writers, schooled in the Latin tradition, thought about and approached language for the next several centuries. Letters for Isidore have symbolic and mystical significance, and he gives to them primacy in the linguistic mechanism of memory preservation. He understands written text as an encoded archive of cultural memory: 'The use of letters was invented for the sake of remembering things, which are bound by letters lest they slip away into oblivion'.[13] Just as Augustine, Isidore considers history as dependent on writing: 'Haec disciplina (historia) ad Grammaticam pertinent,

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[10] Făgărăşanu, 'St Augustine and the Issue of Word Origin'; Den Boeft, 'Some Etymologies in Augustine's *De civitate Dei*'; Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, pp. 44–55, 100–108.

[11] Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, pp. 108–18.

[12] Fontaine, 'Cohérence et originalité de l'étymologie isidorienne'; Engels, 'La Portée de l'etymologie isidorienne'; Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, pp. 133–72; Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture*, pp. 209–43. For a more detailed bibliography on Isidorian thought and works, see Henderson, *The Medieval World of Isidore of Seville* and Isidore of Seville, *The 'Etymologies'*, trans. by Barney and others.

[13] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1.3.2. All citations are from the edition by W. M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*. All translations in this article are mine unless otherwise indicated. Another English translation is available in Isidore of Seville, *The 'Etymologies'*, trans. by Barney and others.

quia quidquid dignum memoria est litteris mandatur' (This discipline (historia) has to do with grammar, because whatever is worthy of remembrance is committed to writing).[14]

Although Isidore acknowledges the dichotomy of the natural and arbitrary relationships between words (signifiers) and their referents (signified),[15] the main goal of his *Etymologiae* is to argue that one can arrive at the knowledge of the ontological nature of things (*cognitio rerum*) only through interpreting their linguistic signification.[16] In the chapter '*De etymologia*' (2.29) Isidore explains the main principles of etymological technique, which is based on both semantic and morphological criteria. Semantically, etymologies may be motivated by (1) a cause, reason (*ex causa*), such as *reges* (kings) from *regendum* (ruling) and *recte agendum* (acting correctly); (2) an origin (*ex origine*), such as *homo* (man), who is from *humus* (earth); (3) an antithesis (*ex contrariis*), such as *lutum* (mud), which needs *lavandum* (washing); and (4) names of places, cities, or rivers (although Isidore speaks about this derivation separately it may be considered as a subcategory of (2)). Morphologically, etymologies may be derived from (1) other words (such as *prudens* from *prudentia*); (2) other sounds (such as *garrulus* from *garrulitas*); (3) words in Greek and other languages (*domus*).[17] We cannot tell how conversant the medieval authors of historical narratives were with the nuances of etymological and grammatical theories in general, but we can safely assume that while they knew nothing about Plato's views, and barely heard of Varro's, most of them were familiar with the practice of *etymologia* explained by Isidore of Seville.[18]

Over the last several decades there have appeared a number of convincingly argued studies that examine Isidorian *etymologia*, such as Mark Amsler's

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[14] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1.41.2 (cf. Augustine, *De ordine* 2.12.37).

[15] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1.29.3.

[16] 'Nisi enim scieris, cognitio rerum perit' (If you do not know the name, knowledge of things is lost) (Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 1.7.1). In explaining the use of etymology he says: 'Cuius cognitio saepe usum necessarium habet in interpretatione sua. Nam dum videris unde ortum est nomen, citius vim eius intellegis. Omnis enim rei inspectio etymologia cognita planior est' (The knowledge of a word's etymology often has an indispensable usefulness for interpreting the word, for when you have seen whence a word has originated, you understand its force more quickly. Indeed, one's insight into anything is clearer when its etymology is known) (Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1.29.2).

[17] Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 2.29.3–5.

[18] On reception of Isidore of Seville, see Fear and Wood, *Isidore of Seville and his Reception in the Early Middle Ages*; Elfassi and Ribémont, *La Réception d'Isidore de Séville*.

revealing article on Isidore's and Vico's use of etymology in the interpretations of names,[19] and a series of articles by Rolf Baumgarten on etymology in Irish tradition.[20] On a more comparative level, Johannes Bronkhorst, a scholar of Sanskrit, has even argued that the use of etymologies of the Isidorian kind (he calls them 'semantic etymologies') is a universal phenomenon across societies, periods, and linguistic traditions and has suggested that it should be studied in comparison to magic and magical acts.[21] And of course, an important step towards considering *etymologia* outside of the scope of grammatical discourse has been taken by R. Howard Bloch: he turns to *etymologia* to show that medieval history, grammar, and theology are conceived in genealogical terms.[22]

With such strong evidence for the heuristic and metaphysical understanding of *etymologia*, why so rarely do we dare to imagine (in print) that medieval etymologies are not simply literary puns and ornamental tropes? Why has no comprehensive and comparative study considered the epistemological value of — let's call it — *historiographic etymologizing*? Why aren't there more studies analysing functional differences between the application of epistemological *etymologia* and its other uses — literary, allegorical, and mnemonic?

As questions of linguistic use are at the core of medieval *etymologia*, it has mainly been studied in the framework of grammatical theory and related discourses of interpretation and rhetoric. Its function in historical discourse has likewise been understood primarily within the trope of figurative language. This may be due to the prestige of the classical allegorical poetics and the generally shared view among modern scholars of medieval historical narrative as *storytelling* and *literature*, not to mention an almost universal stigma of origin stories as mythography. The study of origin stories, in particular, has largely focused on identifying factually true and realistically verifiable elements in order to release them from the literary scaffolding attached to fact. The practice of *etymologia* has thus been perceived as the 'place of invention', directed at learning about language, and not about the world outside of language. In discounting the epistemological function of historiographic etymologizing, modern scholarship has also followed an authoritative verdict of Ernst Robert Curtius, who consid-

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[19] Amsler, 'Literary Onomastics and the Descent of Nations'.

[20] Baumgarten, 'Placenames, Etymology, and the Structure of *Fianaigecht*'; Baumgarten, 'Etymological Aetiology in Irish Tradition'; Baumgarten, 'Creative Medieval Etymology and Irish Hagiography'; and Baumgarten, 'Etymology'.

[21] Bronkhorst, 'Etymology and Magic'.

[22] Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, esp. pp. 30–63.

ered most cases of etymologizing as 'insipid trifling' and 'ornament of poetry'. The only exception that he makes is for Isidore of Seville, whom Curtius sees as engaged with the epistemological function of signification, proceeding 'from *verba* to *res*'.[23] Even though Curtius acknowledges that Isidore's *Etymologiae* 'molded their (i.e. the Middle Ages's) thought categories', Isidorian etymologizing does not become recognized as a systematic practice of epistemological inquiry in medieval historical writings.

The theory of *etymologia* and its pedagogical use have been well documented in grammatical and rhetorical discourse. But what about *etymologia* as practice? The history of 'practical' *etymologia* and its metaphysical application in historical discourse is yet to be written. This chapter, being a part of a larger project on the use of *etymologia* in historical discourse, grows out of an observation that in medieval historical narratives a significant concentration of etymological interpretations is in sections that deal with the legendary past and questions of origin, while the rest of the text is often almost free of etymological reasoning. This has inspired me to examine whether medieval historians understood the practice of etymologizing along the lines of Isidore's *Etymologiae sive origines* (that is, as a method to search for origins), and whether historiographic etymologizing has a function that goes beyond didactic and allegorical.

A Note on Ethnonyms

Among all the words of a language, ethnonyms (names of ethnic groups) have a special claim of bearing the mark of history. Isidore proposes four criteria by which *gentes* (nations) can be distinguished — law, language, origin, and customs — of which language is clearly his top choice.[24] Following Jerome, Isidore views the names of biblical peoples as containing *praesagium* — an innate knowledge of the past and the future:

> Plerique primorum hominum ex propriis causis originem nominum habent. Quibus ita prophetice indita sunt vocabula, ut aut futuris aut praecedentibus eorum causis conveniant.[25]

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[23] Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, pp. 495–500, esp. pp. 496–97.

[24] The first chapter of Book IX, *De linguis gentium* (Languages of the Nations), ends with: 'Ideo autem prius de linguis, ac deinde de gentibus posuimus, quia ex linguis gentes, non ex gentibus linguae exortae sunt' (We have treated languages first, and then nations, because nations arose from languages, and not languages from nations). Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9.1.14.

[25] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 7.6.1.

[Many of the earliest humans derive their names from the causes that are characteristic to them (*ex propriis causis*). The words for their names (*vocabula*) were bestowed upon them prophetically, so that they correspond either to their future or to their preceding causes.]

In *Etymologiae* and his other historical works, Isidore sets an example of how ethnonyms should be analysed and how the causes (*causa*) that have been obscured by time should be revealed: some were named after a river, a forest, or a city of their residence, others by the name of their king or a progenitor (such as Persians or Medes), yet others (such as Albanians) from the colour of their hair.[26]

To examine Isidorian etymologizing of ethnonyms in late medieval historical narratives I have chosen the names indicating the Slavs and individual Slavic ethnic groups for a reason. Latinity is typically not associated with the range of issues devoted to Slavs, whose history is often viewed as something marginal to European tradition, or pertaining to a separate field of 'Eastern European studies'. I hope to show that such a view is ineffective and biased, and that Slavic-speaking authors writing in Latin and their own vernaculars approached the very word for the Slavs in a true Latinate scholarly fashion. Most examples, with a few exceptions, come from the legendary sections of chronicles, which describe the origin and genealogy of the Slavic peoples and use *etymologia* in order to explain these foundations.

Slavs Are 'the People of the Word'

The linguistic sensibility of the connection between language and self-awareness of a nation or an ethnic group is already embedded in the (perceived) etymology of the endonym of the Slavs — *slověne*, from the word *slovo* meaning 'word'.[27] An ethnolinguistic opposite of this self-identification is the Slavic name for their German-speaking neighbours: Russian and Bulgarian *nemets*, Czech *němec*, Polish *niemiec*, etc., from the word *nemyi* that means 'mute, not speaking'. The Slavic case is not unique. Likewise, the Greeks chose linguistic unintelligibility as a defining characteristic to call their non-Greek neighbours *barbaroi*, imitating their foreign language that sounded like 'bar-bar'.[28] The jux-

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[26] Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 9.2.64.

[27] On the etymology of the ethnonym 'slověne', see Ivanov and Toporov, 'O drevnikh slavianskikh etnonimakh'; Maher, 'The Ethnonym of the Slavs'; Bačić, 'Slav'; Trubachev, *Etnogenez i kul'tura drevneishikh slavian*, pp. 304–05, 312–13, 335–36.

[28] Conscious of this connection, the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus derives the term *laós*

taposition of 'not-speaking' or 'speaking unclearly' and 'the ability to speak understandably' is also known to exist in the name of the Mayan tribe Tojolabal of the Mexican state of Chiapas, which means 'clear speech, clear words'.

Among the newly Christianized Slavs the word *slovo* acquires additional meaning as it translates the Greek *logos* and inherits the important religious connotations that this Christian concept conveys. The correlation of the name of the Slavs with the *Slovo-Logos* is played out in one of the earliest Slavic texts, the late ninth- or early tenth-century *Prologue* (also known as *Proglas*), a metrical introduction to the Church Slavonic translation of the Gospels, ascribed sometimes to St Constantine-Cyril, the Byzantine missionary and inventor of the Slavic alphabet, although it is more likely a work of one of his followers, a Bulgarian scholar and Bishop of Preslav, Constantine.[29] Assuming a polemic tone, the author composes an apology for the liturgy and for writing in the native Slavic tongue, defending the need for a comprehensible language of worship. He calls the word of God that is spoken in a foreign language useless and empty, similar to a sound of a copper bell:

> Tuzhdemь ęzykomь slyshashte slovo,
> ęko mědьna zvona glasъ slyshite.
>
> [Hearing the Word in a foreign language,
> Is like hearing the sound of a copper bell.][30]

In reference to the Christological prophecy of Isaiah, which is paraphrased at the beginning of the poem ('I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory'),[31] the author of the *Prologue* weaves together several motifs. He sees the letters of the Slavic tongue as incarnated in Slovo-Logos and compares their coming to the Slavs to the coming of Christ. Poetic (and etymological) linguistic means reinforce this idea: the inherent relationship between the Slavs and the Slovo-Logos is manifest in the harmony of their names: *narody **slov**ĕnьsti* (Slavic peoples) and ***slovo***. By engaging the words

(people) from *lalō* (speak), maintaining that people are so called for their faculty of speaking that sets them apart from the animals. Allen, 'The Stoics on the Origin of Language and the Foundations of Etymology'.

[29] Vaillant, 'Une poésie vieux-slave'. For the edition, see Ivanov, *Balgarski starini iz Makedoniia*, pp. 338–44; 'St Constantine's Prologue to the Gospels', ed. by Jakobson; Toporov, 'Slovo i premudrost', pp. 33–36.

[30] The English translation of the complete text of the Church Slavonic *Prologue*, albeit not always consistent, is in Petkov, *The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria*, pp. 61–64.

[31] King James Bible, Isaiah 66. 18.

slovo (*word*), *slyshite* (you hear), and *slověne* (Slavs) in a polyphonic play the author highlights one of the main ideas of his poem — that the Slavs are the predestined people of God's Slovo-Logos:

> **Sly**shite ubo, narody **slov**ěnьsti
> **Sly**shite **slovo** otъ Boga bo pride,
> **Slovo** zhe krъmę chlověchьskyję dushę,
> **Slovo** zhe krěpę i srъdьtse i umъ,
> **Slovo** gotovę vьsę boga poznati.

> [Listen, oh you Slavic peoples,
> Listen to the Word, because it came from God,
> The word that nurtures the human souls,
> The word that fortifies the heart and mind,
> The word that makes us ready to know God.]

The author of the Slavonic *Prologue* is considered to be well versed in Byzantine poetic forms and patristic thought, having been particularly inspired by the teachings of Gregory of Nazianzus (the Theologian).[32] Interestingly, although he was most likely moved by phonetic similarity alone, the words *slovo* and *slyshite* are, in fact, genetically related. They are both reflexes of the Indo-European root *k'leu-, which also produced another etymon, the Common Slavic word *slava* ('glory'), quite popular not only in the medieval period but also during the Romantic age as the source of the name for the Slavs.[33] This etymology that casts the Slavs as glorious people is championed by one of the most famous Czech scholars, the church reformer John Hus, in one of his disputations from 1406.[34]

The etymological connection between the Slavs and *slovo* in the *Prologue* is clearly informed by the Byzantine theological rhetoric and the patristic teaching of Slovo-Logos. A similar etymological interpretation is advanced by Přibík Pulkava of Radenín, who composed his *Chronica Bohemorum* in both Latin and Czech prose. Pulkava, a school administrator and a parson, first wrote his chronicle in Latin in the 1360s at the orders and under the direct supervision

[32] Jakobson, 'The Slavic Response to Byzantine Poetry', pp. 258–59; Toporov, 'Slovo i premudrost'; Sterk, 'Gregory the Theologian, Constantine the Philosopher', pp. 229–33.

[33] Toporov, 'Slovo i premudrost', pp. 53–55. This theory is alive even today. One of the modern explanations is that 'Slava' was a name of the great Mother-Goddess of the Slavs and their self-identification reflects this ancient pagan cult. Borovskii, 'O nazvanii velikoi bogini slavian'.

[34] Stejskal, 'Klášter Na Slovanech' (2), p. 17.

of the Czech king and Holy Roman emperor Charles IV.[35] Borrowing from the biblical exegetical tradition, Pulkava explains the origin of the Slavic tongue and people as a direct consequence of the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel and offers an etymological interpretation for its name:

> Et inde nominata est turris eadem Babel, quod interpretatur linguarum confusio. Ibi eciam unum ydioma slouanicum, quod corrupto vocabulo slauonicum dicitur, sumpsit inicium, de quo gentes eiusdem ydiomatis Slouani sunt vocati. In lingua enim eorum slowo verbum, slowa verba dicuntur, et sic a verbo vel verbis dicti ydiomatis vocati sunt Slouani.[36]

> [Therefore that tower was called Babel, which is interpreted as the confusion of languages. There the Slavic (*Slouanica*) tongue originated, which is called by a corrupted name *Slauonica*, and from this tongue the people who speak it were called the Slavs (*Slouani*). Because in their language *verbum* is said *slovo* and *verba* is said *slova*. So the Slavs (*Slouani*) are called from the word *slovo* or *slova* of this tongue.]

Pulkava manages to pack a lot of information in this short fragment. By situating the origin of the Slavic tongue at the Tower of Babel, which he connects etymologically with the confusion of languages, he embeds the Slavs in the biblical narrative. He not only defines the origin of the Slavs from 'the Word', one of the most important Christian concepts, but also identifies the phonological difference between *slouanica* and *slauonica* and dismisses the latter spelling, which etymologically associates the Slavs with the Latin word for 'slave'.

Although Pulkava's etymological reasoning seemed to satisfy historians who wrote after him, his genealogical claim did not pass without criticism. In his own account of the Bohemian past, *Historia Bohemica*, the learned and eru-

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[35] To articulate his dynasty's eminence and legitimacy, Charles commissioned a number of historiographic works of the Czech people that he personally supervised. The authors were expected to compose narratives that glorify the Slavs and substantiate their ancient and noble roots. The *Chronica Ecclesiae Pragensis* by Beneš Krabice of Weitmil (first part until 1346 and second part until 1374), the *Chronica Pragensis* by Canon Francis of Prague (dedicated to Charles in 1353), and the *Chronica Bohemorum* by Přibík Pulkava of Radenín (last redaction, 1374). These chronicles were based on the early twelfth-century work by Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Boemorum*. The Czech translation, along with background studies, is in *Kroniky doby Karla IV*, ed. by Bláhová. The general appeal and significance of Pulkava's chronicle is demonstrated by the fact that the Latin original compilation was later somewhat loosely translated into Czech and German and became a source of many subsequent historians.

[36] *Pulkavae Chronicon Bohemiae*, ed. by Emler and Gebauer, p. 4.

dite Enea Silvio Piccolomini ridicules the theory of the Czech people's origin directly from the Tower of Babel tribes, pointing out the lack of evidence.[37]

The Name of the Slavs Is Divinely Inspired

The idea of a name for a nation as divinely inspired is not unique to historical narratives about the Slavs. A story of such naming baptism of an ethnic group is found in the foundational chronicle of the Czechs, the early twelfth-century *Chronica Boemorum* by Cosmas of Prague. Cosmas narrates that when the ancestors of the Czechs settled around the mountain Řip, the elder (*senior*) Boemus, who led them to this 'destined land' (*terra fatalis*), turned to the people with the task of selecting a name for themselves. In response, they unanimously decided to be called after his first name, Boemus. Their choice, however, is not random or fanciful but is directed by a divine force:

> 'Sed cum hec talis, tam pulchra ac tanta regio in manibus vestris sit, cogitate, aptum terre nomen quod sit'. Qui mox quasi ex divino commoniti oraculo: 'Et unde', inquiunt, 'melius vel aptius nomen inveniemus, quam, quia tu, o pater, diceris Boemus, dicatur et terra Boemia?'[38]

> ['But since so great and so beautiful a realm will be in your hands, consider what name might be appropriate for the land'. And they, as if moved by a divine oracle, said: 'And whence will we find a better or a more suitable name, than yours. Since your name, O father, is Bo(h)emus, and the land will be called Bohemia?']

The role of a ruler in the life of the people has always been recognized as crucial. Ancient Greek, Roman, and Byzantine historians viewed the historical process as a succession of epochs defined by a ruling leader, and they organized their narratives around the reigns of their respective emperors. After all, it was Isidore who had shown that ever since biblical times the origin of nations was often associated with their leaders, while their names derive from their progenitors.[39] So it is not surprising that names of leaders become an object of linguistic reflection and what we might describe as an etymological syllogistic reconstruction: 'If the land is called Bohemia there must have been a forefa-

[37] Aenea Silvio, *Historia Bohemica*, ed. by Martínková and others, pp. 12, 14.

[38] Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Boemorum*, ed. by Bretholz and Weinberger, p. 7.

[39] Madai was the progenitor of the nation of Medes (Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 9.2.28.), Persians are called so after King Perseus (9.2.47), the Hebrews after Heber, the great grandson of Shem (9.2.51), Romans after Romulus, who found the city of Rome (9.2.84), etc.

ther named Bohemus'. This scenario is supported by the fact that in the Czech-language variants of this legend, such as that by Pulkava (see below), the leader is usually called by the endonym Čech, not by the Latin exonym Bohemus, preserving the etymological correlation Čech – Čechy, Bohemus – Bohemia. The understanding of language as a natural sign and the mechanism of naming as a speech act warrants the story of the primeval people 'moved by a divine oracle', not unlike the Stoic belief in the primitive linguistic wisdom, or the biblical speaking in tongues.[40]

As an extension of this narrative, a famous legend about two, and sometimes three, brothers, the progenitors of the Slavs — Čech, Lech (a name for the Poles), and Rus — has developed in a number of chronicles.[41] Extrapolated from an ambiguous phrase in the early fourteenth-century Czech *Dalimil Chronicle* ('V tej zemi bieše Lech jemuž jme bieše Čech'; There was Lech in that land, whose name was Czech), it took shape in the early fourteenth-century version of the *Chronica Poloniae Maioris* ('tres fratres filii Pan principis Pannoniorum [...] primogenitus Lech, alter Rus, tercius Čech'), and burgeoned in later Polish chronicles.[42] The author of the *Chronica Poloniae Maioris* investigates the legend of the ethnic origin of the Slavs, finding an etymological interpretation that helps him in this task.[43]

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[40] Likewise, the biblical story of Creation and Adam's choice of names for the created transpire through speaking. Another origin story in Cosmas's chronicle, in which prophetess Libuše foretells the foundation of Prague, also occurs through the etymological ritual of naming (Verkholantsev, 'Etymological Argumentation as a Category of Historiographic Thought', pp. 242–43).

[41] It is tempting to note that the story of the three brothers Čech, Lech, and Rus is reminiscent of Isidore's story of the three brothers Italus, Sabinus, and Sicanus, who gave their names to the Italians, Sabines, and Sicilians respectively (*Etymologiae*, 9.2.85), and, of course, of the biblical narrative of human genealogy deriving from the three sons of Noah.

[42] *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, ed. by Kürbis, pp. 4, 130; Třeštík, *Mýty kmene Čechů*, pp. 57–70. The legend of three brothers is not yet present in the manuscript from the 1290s, which represents the earliest version of this chronicle. The author of this late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century chronicle is not definitively established. Among possible authors are named Godisław Basco, *custos* of Poznań, and Bishop Bochuwał of Poznań. The work's importance lies in its view of Polish history emphasizing the superiority of the region of Great Poland and the origins of the Poles.

[43] On etymological argumentation in Cosmas's *Chronica Boemorum*, anonymous *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, and a number of other historical narratives, see Verkholantsev, 'Etymological Argumentation as a Category of Historiographic Thought'.

Slavs Descend from the Greeks

The biblical narratives that trace human genealogy from Noah's sons and the confusion of languages (and tribes) at the Tower of Babel inspired many historians to locate the beginnings of their nations at one or both of these crucial demographic junctions. The author of the *Chronica Poloniae Maioris* derives the origin of the Slavs from Japheth's grandson Elisha, whose father Javan[44] is also considered to be the progenitor of the Greeks, making the Slavs and the Greeks cousins.[45] He uses linguistic evidence to contest another genealogical theory that stated that the Slavs descend from Noah's other son, Ham, and are therefore related to the Africans. Foreshadowing Indo-European linguistics, he claims linguistic affinity between the Greek and Slavic languages. Although he writes in Latin, the linguistic material that he uses comes from Polish, which he perceives as the language that is fit to represent all Slavic peoples. The author connects the Polish word *pan*, which means 'lord, master' to the Greek root *pan-* with the general semantics of 'all, everything', claiming genetic relationship between Slavic and Greek.[46] He then declares the Roman province of Pannonia a homeland of the Slavs and derives its name from the Greek-Slavic root *pan-*:

> Scribitur enim in vetustissimis codicibus, quod Pannonia sit mater et origo omnium Slavonicarum nationum; Pan enim ixta Graecam et Slavorum interpretationem dicitur 'totum habens'. Et iuxta hoc dicitur Pan in Slauonico maior dominus [...]. Omnes autem domini pan appellantur. [...] et hii Pannonii a pan dicti a Jano nepote Japhet ortum habuere dicuntur. Ex hiis itaque Pannoniis tres fratres filii Pan principis Pannoniorum nati fuere quorum primogenitus Lech, alter Rus, tercius Czech nomina habuerunt.[47]

> [Indeed, it is written in ancient books that Pannonia is the mother and the cradle of all Slavic peoples; in fact, in Greek and Slavic, *pan* designates a person 'who holds everything'. And accordingly, *pan* in Slavic means 'the greatest' [...]. All masters are called *pan*. [...] And these Pannonians, named so from *pan*, are said to origi-

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[44] The spelling of Javan's name in the attested version of the chronicle is 'Janan'.

[45] Genesis 10. 2–4.

[46] In fact, the lexical (socially charged) Iranism *(gъ)panъ, 'lord', is attested only in some West Slavic languages, and in Ukrainian (but not in Sorbian). Trubachev, 'Iz slaviano-iranskikh leksicheskikh otnoshenii'.

[47] *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, ed. by Kürbis, p. 4. On some of the theories about the origin of the Slavs, see Panzer, *Quellen zur slavischen Ethnogenese*.

nate from Janus, a grandson of Japheth. So, from these Pannonians three brothers, sons of Pan, the leader of Pannonia, were born: the first-born Lech, the second Rus, and the third Czech by name.]

He further offers many other etymologies which situate the Slavs in biblical narrative and establish their genealogy in the context of world history.[48] In his etymological zeal, the author clearly tries to emulate Isidore, to whose master-work he himself alludes.[49]

Slavs Are the 'People of the Sun'

The Helleno-Slavic theory, supported by etymological arguments, is further developed by another chronicler. Before Pulkava, Charles IV commissioned Giovanni dei Marignolli, the Florentine Franciscan scholar, a learned theologian, and a papal legate to the court of the Mongol Emperor of China, to put his dynastic agenda and political outlook into historiographic form.[50] Marignolli conceptualized his *Chronica Bohemorum* (1355–58) in the Joachimite prophetic tradition, presenting Bohemia as the centre of the world, uniting East and West, and Charles IV as the Last Emperor, who is destined to restore world peace. In order to present Charles as an heir to the native Bohemian Přemyslid dynasty in a country with predominately Slavic population, Marignolli draws on the Greek theory to create Charles's genealogical lineage: Charles descends from the ancient Greeks and Romans through his parents, John of Luxemburg (1296–1346) and Elisabeth Přemysl of Bohemia (1292–1330). His paternal ancestry connects him with the Trojans and includes Charlemagne and Julius Caesar. His maternal Slavic lineage makes him even more illustrious than other European royal families because through the Slavs he descends from ancient Greeks.[51] Just as it has been done before, Marignolli derives the Slavs from Japhet and Elishah (or Elysa as he spells the name):

[48] For example, Nimrod is presented as a Slav, whose name confirms his Slavic origin based on Polish *Nemerza*. Another etymology regards Dalmatia as the Motherland of the Slavs because its name means 'dala macz' (mother gave).

[49] 'prout Isidorus in primo libro Etymologiarum et Martinus in Cronica Romana videntur declarasse' (*Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, ed. by Kürbis, p. 6).

[50] Joannes de Marignolis, *Kronika*, ed. by Emler. On Marignolli's chronicle, see Bláhová, 'Česká kronika Jana Marignoly', Bláhová, 'Odraz státní ideologie'; Engstová, 'Jan Marignola a památky doby Karla IV'; Kubínová, *Imitatio Romae*, pp. 151–77; Chadraba, 'Apostolus orientis'.

[51] On Charles's 'Hellenoslavism', see Chadraba, 'Kaiser Karls IV. *devotio antiqua*'; Stejskal,

Japhet, pater noster, est tercius filius Noe, unde Sclaui et Boemi sumpserunt origi-
nem, non a Cham, ut fingunt quidam. [...] Elysa, a quo Elysani hodie Sclaui mutata
litera, ut fieri solet.[52]

[Japhet, our father, is the third son of Noah, from whom the Slavs and the Czechs
originated, and not from Cham, as some imagine. [...] Elysa, from whom descend
the Elysians, nowadays the Slavs, with a letter substituted, as it often happens.]

It is very possible that the connection between Elishah and the Greek Elysians
in this passage comes directly from Isidore's *Etymologies*: 'Filii Iavan Elisa, a qui-
bus Graeci Elisaei, qui vocantur Aeolides. Unde et lingua quinta Graece Αἰολὶς
appellatur' (The sons of Javan: Elishah, from whom came the Greek Elysians,
who are called Aeolides. Hence also the fifth language in Greece is called
Aeolic).[53] The allusion to 'a substituted letter' (*mutata litera*) shows Marignolli
knowledgeable about the theory and practice of *etymologia*. He further adds a
creative twist to the Helleno-Slavic theory by connecting Elysa with the Greek
word *helios* (ἥλιος), 'sun' and proposing a rather flattering interpretation:

Fuerunt autem primi Boemi genere Sclaui quasi Elysani. Elysa enim Solaris dicitur.
Unde Eliopolis civitas Solis in Ysaia. [...] Ab Elysa Slaui, qui corrupto vocabulo
Sclaui dicuntur, quasi solares vel luminosi vel magis gloriosi dicuntur. Cuius pars
est Boemia.[54]

[But the first Bohemians have been of Slavic descent, i.e. Elysians. Indeed, Elysa
is called 'solar, belonging to the sun' (*Solaris*). Whence Eliopolis is the city of the
Sun in Isaiah.[55] [...] From Elysa descended the Slavs, who are called by a corrupted
name 'Slaves', as if they are named solar, or luminous, or rather glorious. Bohemia
is part of them.]

Like Pulkava would do a decade later, Marignolli eliminates an etymological
connection to the word *sclavi* meaning 'slave' by pointing out a corrupted spell-

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'Emauzy a český helenoslavismus'; Mel'nikov, 'Hellenoslavism in the Cultural and Political
Conception of the Emperor Charles IV'.

[52] Joannes de Marignolis, *Kronika*, ed. by Emler, p. 522.

[53] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 9.2.34.

[54] Joannes de Marignolis, *Kronika*, ed. by Emler, p. 522.

[55] Marignolli refers to Isaiah's mention of the biblical city Heliopolis (Isaiah 19. 18) in
Egypt: 'in die illa erunt quinque civitates in terra Aegypti loquentes lingua Chanaan et iurantes
per Dominum exercituum civitas Solis vocabitur una' (At that time, there will be five cities in
the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord of the
Heavenly Armies. One of them will be called the City of the Sun (*Heliopolis*)) (International
Standard Version).

ing. Incidentally, following the theory about the Greek origin of the Slavs, the famous reformer and John Hus's associate, Jerome of Prague, claimed at the Council of Constance that 'the Czechs descended from the Greeks'.[56]

Playing with the name Elysa, Marignolli takes his etymological recovery project to the next level. He investigates the name of Charles's mother, Elisabeth, the last offspring of the Přemysl dynasty, and arrives at the following etymological combination: he derives Elisabeth's name (which he spells *Helisabeth* in Latin) from *Helisa* and *beth*, which means 'house' in Hebrew. Together they signify 'the house of Helisa, i.e. the house of the Slavs'. If we recall that Marignolli also connects *Helisa* with the Greek *helios* (sun) then Elisabeth's name defines her as a queen of the illustrious (sunny) nation that takes its origin from the Greeks.[57]

The linguistic source of the above-mentioned etymologies is noteworthy. The author of the *Chronica Poloniae Maioris* works with native Polish material. In contrast, Marignolli, who did not speak Czech, does not use Elisabeth's native Czech name (which would be Eliška) and does not build his etymologies around Czech or even generally Slavic. Instead, he turns to the combination of Greek and Hebrew, which he most likely perceives as providing more authority to his *etymologia*. Indeed, according to Isidore, Hebrew is the mother of all languages,[58] and Greek is more illustrious than other languages, even Latin, because it is more sonorous.[59]

Although Marignolli comes up with a number of unique solutions for the Slavs, his etymological key for the name of Bohemia is less original: he repeats Cosmas's story of the *pater Bohemus* and derives the name of Bohemia from one Boya,[60] thus drawing on the testimony of Roman geographers, who described this region as inhabited by the Celtic Boii.[61]

[56] Stejskal, 'Klášter Na Slovanech' (continuation), p. 12.

[57] Joannes de Marignolis, *Kronika*, ed. by Emler, pp. 507, 520–21.

[58] 'linguam Hebraicam omnium languarum et litterarum esse matrem' (Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1.3.4).

[59] 'Graeca autem lingua inter ceteras gentium clarior habetur. Est enim et Latinis et omnibus linguis sonantior' (Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9.1.4).

[60] 'Sed cum hec tam grata et pulcra patria in manibus vestris sit, cogitate aptum nomen eius. Tunc quasi divino oraculo dixerunt: Unde apcius nomen inveniemus quam, quia tu pater Boemus diceris, terra dicatur et Boemia'; 'Fuit enim inter istos quidam nomine Boyam, a quo dicta est Boemia'. Joannes de Marignolis, *Kronika*, ed. by Emler, p. 523.

[61] Green, *Language and History*, p. 161.

Slavs Are the People of God

Pulkava, who wrote after Marignolli and who was himself Czech, must have felt the tension between the Latin exonym *Bohemia* and the native vernacular endonym *Čechy*. He borrows the origin story of the elder Bohemus from Cosmas, but with a twist. Both in his original Latin version and in his own Czech translation, Pulkava changes the name of the progenitor of the Czechs to the native name Čech, seeking an alternative etymology for the name Bohemia. His solution is indeed well directed: he derives the name of the Bohemians from the Slavic and Old Czech word *bóh* that means 'God':

> Dicitur enim Boemia a boh, quod Deus interpretatur in lingua slouanica. Hac itaque interpretacione a nomine Dei Boemi dicti sunt. Boemia vero in lingua slowanica Czechy secundum nomen primi habitatoris est.[62]

> [Bohemia is called so from *boh*, which is translated in the Slavic language as 'god'. So according to this interpretation the Bohemians are called by the name of God. But in the Slavic language Bohemia is called *Čechy* by the name of its first inhabitant.]

This is a remarkable case that tells us a lot about the inherent connection and interdependence between narrative and etymology: Pulkava retells Cosmas's etymologically motivated origin story, but he replaces the source language: instead of the Latin *Bohemus* the story now features the vernacular endonym *Čech* (Czech), which otherwise is in danger of being left without an etymon. The ease with which the language is substituted highlights the principle of the etymological method that puts the etymological narrative template over the choice of specific linguistic material. In Pulkava's explanation of both names, Bohemia and Čechy, it turns out that all linguistic means point to the same conclusion that the Slavic Bohemians are truly God's people: their name derives from the words for Word and God. Even Enea Silvio, who was critical of Pulkava's other genealogical claims, accepts this interpretation: 'Zechii quoque familiam Bohemos, id est divinos, appellant' (The clan of Czechs is actually called Bohemi, that is, 'God's people).[63]

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[62] *Pulkavae Chronicon Bohemiae*, ed. by Emler and Gebauer, p. 4.

[63] Aenea Silvio, *Historia Bohemica*, ed. by Martínková and others, p. 16.

Concluding Remarks: Etymologia as Practice in Origin Narratives

The philosophy and practice of *etymologia* differs fundamentally from the logic and method of modern historical comparative linguistics, which determines genetic relationship between words on the basis of regular phonological change. Unlike modern linguistic etymology, medieval etymologizing accepts as an ontological axiom that any existing sound similarities in human language are not coincidental and, therefore, they are meaningful. While modern etymological study is diachronic, medieval *etymologia* is what linguists would call synchronic, or, in medieval terms, it is extratemporal: in the mind of a medieval grammarian and historian it operates outside of time. It is unfortunate that modern linguistic scholarship has appropriated the term 'etymology' to associate it with its principles, making the over two-millennia-old tradition 'erroneous', 'false', and 'pseudo'. But it is worth remembering that viewing medieval *etymologia* as 'false' is nothing but a projection of our own mindset onto historical sources that we undertake to interpret. It confuses and misleads us into deeming medieval scholars ill-informed, naïve, and unsophisticated. And this does not put us any closer to understanding medieval sources. We would better understand how medieval etymologizing is used and what meaning it carries in historical texts if we consider it in its own philosophical and intellectual context, and not by looking down on it from the podium of our modern scientific achievements.

One of the principles of medieval *etymologia* — the one that modern scholarship has an especially hard time accepting — is that it discounts the possibility of only one correct solution: all etymological interpretations of the signifiers have equal capacity to reveal the truth about the signified, if obtained through appropriate etymological procedure. This is why multiple interpretations do not compete: they complement, expand, and enhance. In accepting this polyphony, medieval historians act as faithful followers of the Stoics and Varro, who, incidentally, were also criticized for exactly the same 'error' at their own time.[64]

The fact that the practice of medieval historiographic etymologizing involves what modern linguists and historians consider unscientific methods does not in itself indicate that the etymological explanations, such as those discussed above, are intentionally contrived and ideologized fictions or poetic allegories, as they are often represented to be. If medieval *etymologia* stems from a philosophical viewpoint that language has fossilized historical reality, then the

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[64] Domaradzki, 'Theological Etymologizing in the Early Stoa', pp. 127–29.

etymological excavation of ethnonyms should lead to the artefacts of the origin and historical mission of the nations that they signify.

As a final point, let us revisit the question of the function and meaning of etymologized Slavic names. A student of ethnonymy should of course keep in mind that it is a historical category. Whereas exonyms (names given by others) are created by neighbouring communities as they start interacting with each other, endonyms (self-names) appear and develop along with the formation of the collective self-awareness, when communities realize that they need a name to distinguish themselves from others. When a community feels the need to establish and legitimize its origins, it turns to what modern scholarship calls historical and linguistic mythography. Yet the mechanism of mythography is not necessarily a partisan one: a historian who uses *etymologia* as a part of his mythography project may or may not be invested in the questions of myth-making and political bias, but he invariably operates within the framework of historiographic rhetorical discourse, which is guided by the needs of Christian exegesis. Following Isidore, the authors whose etymologizing techniques we have examined above use *etymologia* as an epistemological tool that helps them explain the ontological nature of names under investigation, not as an allegorical device or a poetic metaphor. To paraphrase Curtius, etymologizing should be recognized as a 'historiographische Denkform', a form of historiographic thought. The examination of *etymologia* in the context of historical narrative should thus go beyond linguistic studies; it needs to be taken seriously by historians as a medieval historiographical structure and epistemological method.

It is worth emphasizing that the observed linguistic strategies involve both vernacular and sacred languages. The use of Czech, Polish, and Croatian as source languages shows that late medieval historian-etymologists believe that not only three sacred languages — Latin, Greek, and Hebrew — but also a native tongue possess the ability to reveal hidden truths. Most importantly, though, the discussed sources demonstrate that late medieval authors writing in the eastern and central European lands were not strangers to what is usually perceived as a distinctly 'western European' tradition, and they fearlessly navigated the labyrinths of etymological itineraries.

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